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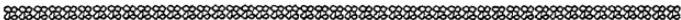
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JOSEPH HUSSLEIN, S.J., PH.D., GENERAL EDITOR





“HOUSE OF CARDS”

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Alice Curtayne

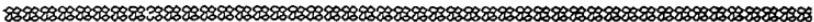
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To STEPHEN

“HOUSE OF CARDS”

PART ONE



Chapter One

THE human mind is inexplicable. It was the last thing she had expected, that pictures of her countryside should so obsess her thoughts on the brink of this great adventure. She had matters to think about of more moment than mere scenery, and yet, as the train moved out of the station, it was the landscape of her homeland that filled her mind to the exclusion of every other idea.

The road that goes from the little town of Pallasgrange to the Glen of Killiskey is the loveliest of all the thoroughfares leading from that market centre, either to the splendour of the everlasting sea on its western side, or to the majesty of the encircling mountains looking down on its streets.

On the Killiskey road, the surrounding heights play the strangest tricks of perspective. When the pedestrian looks to the south as he leaves the town the mountains seem to hang across the end of the street like a great purple curtain, except on sunny days when they become azure and dimly beckoning, or at evening when their vast frontage is constantly swept by rich and changing colours. The Killiskey road runs with steep determination out of the little hollow in which the town reposes, past the genteel residences of the suburbs with their high surrounding walls and closed gates, where the base of a second and lower range of heights comes suddenly into view, looking

as though the patchwork of little green fields, dotted with small white houses, swept straight up into the sky. This road of predilection then winds across an elevated plateau of poor tillage land and reedy pasturage to the foot of a low brown hill, covered with heather and scrub, but deeply creviced where the road meets it by a hidden glen, radiantly green in comparison with its dun background, invitingly mysterious, and full of the murmurs of wind and water.

In the two miles of its passage from the town to the foot of the glen, this upland, open road is full of light and airy spaciousness. The grandeur of the surrounding landscape lies gently upon all the length of it like a blessing. Far off to the right, across the flat and boggy waste, the silver arm of the bay sweeps round to the foot of a great mountain range. And beyond the low hill where this road ends, those airy mountain contours can be discerned trooping toward the sea, gorgeous and noble shapes brushing the sky, or like the blue walls — fantastic in height and shape — of some fairy castle.

Not only the blessing of unfading grandeur lies upon this road, but it is filled too from end to end with a mysterious exaltation. Above the glen, a track leads over the hill to a neighbouring town, and poor men of the roads and an occasional poor woman, use this convenient short cut. When they reach that arena in its amphitheatre of mountain and sea, road weariness drops from them and they break into song, or into a form of speech that is like verse. And more prosperous country folk, hurrying homeward in their rattling carts, are sensible too of the encompassing gladness and they cease to goad the beast when it drops into a walk.

The Killiskey glen is never reached without a thrill, communicated even to those least susceptible to scenic effect. In early summer, the narrow boreen leading from the high road to its entrance is richly coloured on both mossy banks with violets and primroses growing in a profusion unrivalled elsewhere in the district. Later in the year, the hedges break out into creamy masses of elder flower, while tall sentinels of foxgloves stand in groups along the banks, and ferns unfold their delicate fronds under the scented festoons of wild woodbine and dog rose.

Arriving in the glen, one is almost confused by the insistence of the river brawling noisily through it. The steep bed of this waterway forms the bottom of the narrow valley — great, brown and moss-grown boulders, through which the river works its way, leaping over the larger stones in long white cascades, that gleam through the twisted holly trees stooping over the banks. There are pebbles on the edges of this charmed river, and occasional patches of sand, as well as deep quiet pools, brown and clear, in odd corners of its depth. On summer days, one can sit on a flat rock and dangle hot, tired feet in a limpid pool, or wade from side to side over the boulders, or lie on a heathery slope gazing at the plumed foliage of the rowan trees waving near the top of the glen’s precipitous sides, or listening to the unending cadences of the water, a booming substratum of sound, overlaid with purling whispers and a thousand different liquid gurgles and merry tinkles.

She was leaving all that, exchanging it lightly for the unknown. Anne Farrelly, sitting primly in a corner seat of an empty third-class compartment, in a train now puffing its way out of Pallasgrange, did not welcome the bright pictures that unexpectedly filled her mind. It was all over.

She was leaving Ireland for England. Her destination was the manufacturing city of Mallingford. She was seventeen, and she had been looking forward to this supreme adventure as long as she could remember. It had always been agreed that such was her destiny. Why then should this sudden nostalgia for the scenes of her childhood so unaccountably assail her? She craned out of the window to look at the receding town, of which the last glimpse from the train is a smoky blue mist hanging over the irregular and scattered groups of grey roofs, with the tapering church spire rising up out of their midst.

The train journey from Pallasgrange to any station of importance is really a serious affair, in reference to both time and scenic effect. It takes three hours to reach the nearest city and, as for the metropolis of Dublin, it is a whole day's journey away. The scenic effect of such an expedition is solemn because for forty miles the main railway line has to edge its way in and out through the skirts of the mountains lying back of the town. Sometimes, for a mile or more, those towering great shapes rise sheer from the railway track, hemming in the train on both sides like grim grey stone walls, scarcely relieved by their tufts of heather and bracken.

Even on the sunniest day, those bulky shapes, those rough-hewn masses of stone, as viewed from the creeping train, are dark and forbidding. To the traveller alone in a compartment, to whom solitude gives every opportunity for assimilating impressions, it is a landscape conveying an idea of cleavage, or closure, like a journey from one world into another, for there is a totally different region on either side of the mountain barrier.

Anne was vividly conscious of this sense of finality and

overawed by it too, as she sat tensely, her shoulders squared, her very toes tingling with excitement, eager grey eyes restlessly sweeping the windows of the compartment framing the slowly receding mountains.

It was all over. She was going away. The massive heights through which the train was wending were a sort of embodiment of the tremendous nature of her enterprise. Their dark and forbidding sides seemed to tell her that there was no turning back. She would never again live in Pallasgrange. She would return there only on the sort of condescending visits that her sisters indulged in on their annual holidays. There would be no turning back now. The Farrelly's did not turn back. And anyhow the nieces of this world do not usually turn back to an Aunt Hannah.

Hannah Farrelly was, to begin with, an extraordinarily unattractive woman. She suffered from goitre and the collar that touched the lobes of her ears was intended to conceal the manifold deformities of her neck. Her eyes had the unfortunate protuberance that characterizes the disease. She was tall and scraggly and angular, with a nose that looked frostbitten even in the warmest weather and an enormously high and bumpy forehead from which the wispy, greying hair was dragged back in an untidy bunch. She dressed uniformly in black ever since the death of her brother (the children's father) fifteen years before. But it was not her appearance that repelled affection; it was her nature.

Yet it was strange how the parish, one and all, united in their praise of Hannah Farrelly for her zealous mothering of her orphaned nieces. She had not indeed voluntarily undertaken the responsibility; she had been jockeyed into it by the fates. When her brother, Eugene, married, she

had continued to live with him, because it was his choice to live on in the house that was their old home, and Hannah had “rights” to it. A solicitor with the merest ghost of a practice at that time, Eugene Farrelly was not in a position to set up house elsewhere. Ten years later, when his wife died at the birth of their third daughter, he had no longer any inclination to live elsewhere. His sister, Hannah, now fixed in spinsterhood both by ill health and by natural disposition, took over the care of the girls until she could “see what could be done.” One year later, she was still hopefully scanning the horizon for a solution, when Eugene died after a brief illness. Hannah was left with the three little girls on her hands and only a pittance to finance their upbringing. Joylessly, she began to collect in the small rentals accruing to the girls from their mother’s property, spending it on their upkeep. These rentals seemed progressively to dwindle as the girls grew older, while their expenses always increased. The means of the little household became so straitened that Hannah grew more disgruntled every day as she wrestled anew with the financial problem.

She sent her charges to the best school in the town, scraping and scrooging to provide the fees because, she argued, they would have to have a good education if they were to find careers. It was clearly Hannah’s one aim in life to make the children self-dependent as early as possible. She made no secret of the fact that she looked forward to the day when she would have them off her hands.

Every tradesman in the town knew her sharp red nose and straggling grey hair under a shapeless hat. They gave her grudging admiration as a shrewd and hard bargainer, a close-fisted and clever housekeeper. It was her habit to

make her purchases as soon as the shops opened in the morning, when there were usually no other customers abroad to compete with her for the assistant's attention. The butcher viewed her descent on him with something like a groan. Hannah would lengthily choose the most economical piece of meat, and then bargain down the price, in addition to asking for “a few bones for stock,” a lump of suet, a morsel of liver, and other oddments free of charge. In every shop, she had the same relentless eye for what could be had for nothing.

The market women dreaded her particularly. She would swoop down on them early on Saturday morning, as they stood about the square, their produce displayed on their donkey carts, or in the broad baskets on their hips. Hannah would go the whole round of the vendors, examining everything minutely; the chickens tied in pairs; the eggs in their nests of hay; the rounds of butter each stamped engagingly with a cow and laid on a broad cabbage leaf, the whole dairy exhibit covered with a snow-white cloth. She would look, too, at the horse rails and donkey rails of turf, picking up an occasional sod and breaking it through her fingers to test its worth, or thoughtfully toeing the piles of cabbages and heaps of potatoes thrown on the ground; putting her nose into the churns from which the shawled women were vociferously selling buttermilk; sniffing at the fish in the men's baskets. Her method of buying was to dragoon the vendor: from the country-woman's total price, she would calmly deduct several pennies, pressing the money firmly into the woman's hand and walking serenely away. This trick nearly always prevailed. She could hardly be pursued and the seller would be slightly mollified by the fact that she had given on-

lookers the impression of having paid the full price, and at least had not publicly lowered the market by an audible bargaining down. But the countrywomen discussed her very unfavourably among themselves. They did not share the corporate admiration of the townsfolk; instead they repudiated her as a “mane oul’ wan,” who had “no dacency in her.”

Anne sighed as she recalled her own failure as a buyer in the Saturday market. She found it impossible to manage the market women as her aunt had managed them. They measured the girl at a glance, knowing from her hesitant manner and diffident little voice that she could be dismissed as an opponent unworthy of their steel. She would approach one of the carts and timidly ask for a pound of butter for a shilling.

“It’s one and two the day,” would be the answer.

“But I have only a shilling,” Anne would falter.

The market woman would appeal to her fellow sales-women.

“Glory be to God, would you ever think she’d be so mane, and she with the look of dacency on her an’ all?”

The other women would hitch up their shawls and eye Anne with reproving shakes of the head. She should have retreated at that point, but she would stand there miserably, anxious to secure the butter because there was none at home for tea, but unable to produce the extra coppers. Then the seller would pick up one of the yellow prints out of her basket and extend it to her on its cabbage leaf.

“Taste it! Taste it, so! Don’t be buying a pig in a bag.”

She had no enthusiasm for this time-honoured ceremony of delicately scooping off a morsel of butter with one

finger and slowly savouring it on the tongue. But she would comply to humour the seller.

“It’s grand,” she would pronounce. “I’m not saying ‘tisn’t the best butter, but my aunt only gave me a shilling.”

“Glory be to God, but Miss Farrelly’s the hard woman. Where would she get grand separator butter for that price? Ask her that. Ask her that. Sure it’s one and two all over.” Other buyers would come and go meanwhile, and the pile of golden prints would be diminishing.

“Did you see how *they* paid? Did they make a compliment of the one and two, and they’re poorer than your aunt? Why should she try to do a misfortunate woman out of her money, who’s poorer than herself?” And as Anne still lingered in uncertainty, the woman would say:

“Well, I’ll give it you this wanst, as it’s getting late in the day and I have to be off home. But don’t ask me again to do the like of that. Don’t ask me again.”

Well, it was over now. She was going away at last. She was on her way to become a pupil teacher in an elementary school in Mallingford. The thought thrilled through her. She would be independent. A sort of sunburst had broken over the house on the day Father Blake’s letter arrived from England, saying he confirmed her appointment as junior assistant mistress in the infants’ school of which he was manager. The Reverend Mother at the convent school had shown her the advertisement for this post, advising her to apply for it, as she was qualified to fill it. She had unexpectedly secured it (because hers, though she never imagined it, was the sole application which the manager of that school had received). She was doing something more daring than either of her sisters had done; she was launching forth at seventeen. Neither

Julia nor Mary had taken up a position until the age of nineteen or twenty. But money had become scarcer and scarcer in the family during the past decade, and Hannah had been saying that she simply could not imagine where Anne's college fees were to come from. She said that perhaps if Anne grabbed at this foothold, the college fees might be found for her later on and she could get her certificate. Meanwhile, the teaching experience would be useful to her. Anne had eagerly agreed and her optimistic and soaring heart told her, “I'll never trouble Aunt Hannah for those fees. I'm somehow going to be great and successful and rich.”

It was as though an unexpected door had opened disclosing a shining road that led through the mountains and over the sea to a life of comfort, appreciation, and happiness, where she would at last have time to take stock of an entrancing world and find out what it was all about. She would never again know drudgery, or harsh and inescapable necessities. This was a new era. Its very newness was proclaimed by her clothes. She was wearing a new navy blue coat, both fashionable and useful, the best coat she had ever possessed; a new blue velvet hat, that framed most becomingly her fresh face and straw-coloured hair. She had new shoes and gloves, too, and a handbag of Aunt Hannah's, very little worn, and a new suitcase holding sundry effects, and additional clothes that were nearly new. She reviewed all those possessions with extreme complacency. The carriage seat was comfortable and she settled into it luxuriously. Her state of leisure astounded and delighted her. For hours and hours yet, she could just sit there. She had nothing to do.

She was independent. It was grand to be independent.

Her mind flurried over the thought that her competency was only seventeen shillings a week. In terms of livelihood, she simply did not know what this meant. Her inexperience was mute and could sound no disturbing warnings. Hannah had been impressing upon her the fact that it was small and that she would have to be very careful. This was so like what Hannah was always saying that Anne scarcely listened. Seventeen shillings every week did not seem to her altogether despicable. Her daily shopping had rarely totalled more than five shillings. Hannah had always bought all her clothes. Anne's pocket money had never amounted to more than an odd shilling or florin donated at rare intervals by her aunt. Seventeen shillings was a large sum of money. She would know very well how to manage.

She strove to quell the confusion in her mind as the train rocked and roared on its way. She was not so exuberantly happy as she had expected to be. The actual leavetaking had been unexpectedly distressing: the pathetic figure of her aunt at the railway station, the shabbiness of her clothes compared with the grandeur in which she had decked out her niece; the tears at the last moment that had amazed Anne and made the elder woman suddenly seem infinitely old and lonely. On that last morning Hannah had been doing her best to console her niece. She had persistently tried to console her, greatly to the girl's bewilderment. “It won't be long, sure. And when you're back in the summer, I'll pay your college fees.” Anne did not know that her aunt's heart misgave her at the last moment for thus delivering up to the lions as it were, Eugene Farrelly's youngest daughter. The rather feckless husband and father had lacked nothing in devotion to his children, and he had been particularly attached to

the baby Anne, lifting her up out of her cradle every time he came from his office and walking her about the house, to the great impatience of his sister, who used to chide him for thus losing his time. Those memories revived in Hannah's mind during Anne's last days in Pallasgrange, and they explained why *girleen* and *achree* had been so persistently on her lips toward the end, and why she had burst into sudden generosity in the matter of clothes. But Anne had never been in the habit of pitying her aunt, and she felt annoyed now at the new sensations disturbing her mind.

Was it not an unequivocally good thing to be leaving Pallasgrange? Her sisters, on holiday visits from Dublin, had repeatedly explained that the place was irredeemably wretched; that the shops in particular were unspeakably awful; that the town's insufficiency made life impossible within its radius; there was nothing to be done in Pallasgrange and nowhere to go. Anne found it more difficult than she admitted to make the mental adjustments necessary for the acceptance of such crushing pronouncements. Personally, whenever she had the least speck of money to spend, she enormously enjoyed the Pallasgrange shops, and their custodians were very gracious to her, despite the known smallness of her spending capacity. But her older sisters had experience as yet unknown to her, and she saw no way of rejecting their emphatic assurances. She had no home authority she respected which would contradict those ideas. Hannah's visits to Cork and Dublin had been only of the most unsatisfactory and fugitive kind. She did not know cities. When Anne speculated on the glamour of life elsewhere, Hannah was very willing to concur; she thought any lure a good one which induced the fledgelings

to leave the nest. “You’d be better off to be independent,” was her unvarying judgment. Anne had a dim perception that Aunt Hannah’s conclusion was based on premises different from her own and that no real guidance was to be had from her. The girl perplexedly revolved the question in her mind. The shabby, blistered façades of the shop fronts, the uneven pavements and muddy streets, the little competitive crises among the shopkeepers, the pettiness of the gossip, these confirmed an impression of inferiority. But other factors warred against that impression; the real kindness she had known among the townsfolk and that something in their eyes which was so like understanding; the erratic way in which the crooked cottages on the outskirts of the streets trailed away into attractive little by-lanes, the encompassing mountains which so securely enfolded the town, the sea that was its distant bright frontage, the alluring countryside.

Anne could not solve the debate and she dismissed it from her mind by thinking of another brighter and more alluring picture: her destination, Mallingford. The priest had mentioned in his letter that the school was outside the city. She imagined it, then, as a pleasant house standing in its own grounds, rather like one of the best favoured villas or bungalows outside Pallasgrange. There were grownups like herself bustling about this building, directing agreeable children, who behaved like angels. Anne was the first of the Farrelly’s to go to England, and she imagined that life there was altogether happy. She had not the least idea what she was going to do with her pupils, because, as she had only just passed the preliminary examinations and had not reached the monitress stage at school, she had never in her life stood before a class of

children. The rest of the picture in her mind was somewhat blurred, but pleasantly blurred. She thought that, around this attractive building, inhabited by agreeable people, there were lovely homes in one of which she would live; and around these homes again, in a sort of haze, were beautiful streets with shops, cinemas, theatres, and concert halls, which she would frequent and enjoy in due course.

This dream supported her jauntily through the weary two hours' wait on the muddy and wind-swept platform where she changed trains. Here she broke into the little store of silver provided by her aunt and got herself tea. The boat rather frightened her: its novelty was too overwhelming. It was very noisy. She did not like the straining, creaking clamour, the banging, the sound of swirling, rushing water outside, or the crazy swaying of the floor. She sat up stiffly in her red plush armchair, her eyes now distended and her face shadowed with fatigue. She had not been told about a berth and did not seek one. Her new coat was soon an inadequate protection against the cold. But she was proud of having escaped the ignominy of seasickness while prostrate travellers all around her were grabbing for basins.

It was a somewhat bedraggled passenger who alighted at Mallingford station on the following forenoon. Her dapper freshness was gone; her clothes were crumpled, her hair straggled in wisps, her face was pale. All the passengers were scurrying madly for the ticket barrier, and Anne scurried likewise, gripping her suitcase, her heart beating fast. It was good to have arrived. She had seen the name of this city, her destination, written in letters a foot high. She had not lost her ticket, or lost her way, or lost anything.

The station was enormous! Miles above her head, as it seemed, electric bulbs twinkled in the grey gloom. She felt like a little pygmy racing along under that lofty vaulted roof among the throngs of strangers. The noise was very bewildering: a compound of shrill whistles, rumbles, and reverberations from shunting trains, the banging, slapping, and dragging of merchandise, voices and hurrying footsteps. She was a little breathless from hurrying. She did not know why she had to hurry so much. But people, she thought, were too slow in Pallasgrange. Everyone else was hurrying and she would look conspicuous if she dawdled. This was life now. She was fairly launched in it and she must do as others did. All around her, as she hurried along, people were meeting and greeting. She was seized with a sudden pang of dismay at the realisation that she was absolutely alone in this great city and that no one, so far as she knew, cared a straw whether she had arrived or not.

There was a horrible smell in the station, resembling the effluvia arising from wet ashes. It was a relief to get away from it into the somewhat clearer air of the street outside. Here the throngs were still more bewildering and tram cars were clanging away in every direction. Burdened with her suitcase, Anne walked more slowly now, trying to combat a creeping sensation of helplessness. It was very easy after all, she told herself. The first thing to do was to find the tram going to Falmount. Father Blake, the school manager, lived there and he had concluded his final letter to her by saying somewhat airily: "I suppose we'll be seeing you when you arrive." Anne supposed so too, indeed. His was the only address she possessed in the city. She would go to him first and take her bearings.

Her roving and anxious eye caught sight of a tramway

direction board, from which she learned that the No. 19 went to Falmount. She boarded it with a distinct sensation of triumph. She was managing so nicely, anyone would think she had lived in this city all her life. As the vehicle ground forward, she mounted the stairs the better to dominate the scene, and pressed her nose against the glass. The shops were certainly marvellous, displaying great riches with much taste and elegance, and there appeared to be no end to them. She was almost disappointed there were so many shops, for, she reflected, it would take her a whole lifetime to know them as intimately as she knew the Pallasgrange shops. Presently, however, the city centre was left behind and the tram entered meaner and ever meaner streets. She stared, now unpleasantly fascinated. Pawnshops alternated with cast-off clothes shops, fried fish-and-chips shops, and low saloons. A depressed-looking and slatternly humanity swarmed about these streets. She had never seen people like them: so wearily they dragged their feet, with such blank, joyless faces. Hurdy-gurdies at intervals played lively tunes that mocked the pervading gloom. There was a compound of smells rather worse than the station smell; the very atmosphere was musty and dun. Alternating with the shops, there were blocks of grey tenement houses, soot-encrusted, with grimy windows from which the white faces of children were peering.

It was a long tram ride out to Falmount, quite thirty minutes. The surroundings improved again in this quarter: welcome green glimpses of a park, no shops, and terraces of small houses with little green patches in front. The parish priest's house was easily found. It was on the road and the conductor pointed it out to Anne: a modest

two-storeyed dwelling, with no architectural pretensions, rescued from street proximity by a little shrubbery and a small lawn. Father Blake himself opened the door to Anne's ring. He was white haired and benign. He welcomed her with suavity, but seemed incurious concerning her personal affairs. His tone was formal, and one gentle, appraising glance seemed to satisfy him. When she revealed her dilemma about a place in which to stay, he thought for a moment, and then scribbled an address on a slip of paper and handed it to her. He explained that it was the address of the teacher who was vacating the post now to be occupied by Anne. She lived in the next street and would be able to direct Anne much better than he could. With that, Father Blake conducted his new teacher courteously to the door, cast a perplexed eye on the suitcase she had dropped in the hall, and asked if it were heavy. She smiled a negative assurance, and the door closed behind her. The interview had hardly lasted five minutes.

It was now late afternoon and she began to realise she was formidably hungry. She had not had a good square meal since her breakfast yesterday morning in Pallas-grange. Despite her aunt's remonstrances, she had been utterly unable to eat her dinner before leaving home. Her mounting excitement had choked her. Since then, she had only nibbled buns and chocolate. She felt famished for food — real food.

The suitcase seemed to have become heavier and she walked more slowly now, putting her burden down at frequent intervals to rest her arm. The distance to the next address seemed very long: round the first corner to the right and then down the length of a narrow side road

where some forty little red-brick houses on either side, blankly and dully confronted one another. The houses were as alike as peas. She wondered how their owners distinguished them in the dark when the numbers were not visible. The address she sought was at the very end of this road, now pervaded with a smell of cooking, as though all the kitchens were in front, and they were all having rashers or something fried for tea. The aroma tantalised Anne and made her hungrier than ever. There were Nottingham lace curtains in every window, and invariably an aspidistra stood in a brass pot on a little table between the curtains; in the fanlight over the door, there was either a white plaster horse, or a dusty-looking stuffed bird. Obviously this was the frontal equipment demanded by the standards of this road. Its air of respectability and the lively odours of food, eloquent of the residents' preoccupation, reassured her.

She found the number and gently knocked. A frowsy looking woman with a crimson face, enveloped in a huge check apron, opened the door at once, disclosing almost immediately behind her, a narrow staircase rising steeply out of a tiny hallway. She gave Anne a hard, enquiring stare, that included everything, from her hat and shoes to her suitcase, and said hastily:

“I can't take no more.”

“Pardon?” Anne's preliminary greeting remained unuttered.

“I can't take no more. I'm full up. Haven't a spare bed in the house. Try number forty opposite.”

“I was only going to ask if Miss Rogers was in,” said Anne faintly.

“O-Oh.” The woman's face cleared. “Thought when I

seen your luggage you was goin' to ask to stay 'ere, and I ain't got a inch of room now. I think Miss Rogers is upstairs. Come in, won't yer?"

She closed the door behind Anne and bawled up the stairs.

"Miss Ro-o-gers."

"Ye-e-s."

"She's there. Will you go up?"

Anne dropped her suitcase and ascended the steep little stairs. Two doors confronted her at the top. One was open, disclosing a tiny, narrow bathroom that seemed to lead into a microscopic bedroom. She knocked hesitantly at the other door. A voice sang out:

"Come in."

A tall girl, handsome in a rather bold fashion, with a great mop of untidy black hair, looked up from her sewing and greeted her with a questioning, even startled stare.

"Are you Miss Rogers?" Anne asked timidly.

"Yes." She did not rise, but continued to stare blankly.

"I'm Anne Farrelly."

This obviously meant nothing to Miss Rogers, so Anne supplemented:

"I'm going to teach in your place at St. Anselm's, and Father Blake sent me to you."

"Oh." Miss Rogers' face cleared. She rose to her feet with a certain reluctance.

"You're not thinking of staying here, are you?" she asked in rather a challenging tone.

"I don't know where I'll stay," faltered Anne. "Father Blake sent me to ask you . . ."

"Come in for a while, anyway," said Miss Rogers, in

somewhat kinder tones. She swept a pile of garments from a chair and Anne sat down.

The bedroom wherein Miss Rogers sat enthroned was sufficiently large and adequately furnished, but it was in a state of indescribable confusion. A small hand sewing machine stood on the centre table, crowded with oddments of paper patterns, and pieces of material. All the drawers in the dressing table were pulled open, and garments trailed from them. The wardrobe door was swinging back, disclosing a jumble of hats and boxes. A partly filled trunk stood open on the hearth rug. There was no fire in the grate, but the room was warmed by a portable oilstove that gave forth an acrid reek.

Miss Rogers resumed the work on which she had been engaged. She was pulling the basting threads out of a dark silk frock which she had evidently been sewing on the machine.

“You couldn’t stay here,” she explained. “The house is full. Besides it would be too dear for you here. It’s a guinea a week. Mrs. Gordon never takes less. You’ll be getting only seventeen shillings a week to start with, but they’ll put it up a bit every term till you have two pounds, like I had when I was leaving, and then maybe you could come to a place like this.”

Anne nodded. “I know all that,” she said. “But could you suggest a place where I could stay now for the present?”

Miss Rogers frowned. “It’s awfully hard,” she said. “I stayed for the first year with cousins in the city, and I used to come to St. Anselm’s by tram every morning. Have you only just come?” she went on.

Anne nodded again. “I came from the train to Father

Blake's and then came on here to you. I left my luggage in the hall."

"But where did you come from on the train?"

"Pallasgrange."

Miss Rogers looked perplexed.

"West of Ireland," Anne supplemented.

"My goodness!" Miss Rogers surveyed her with new interest. "You have *some* courage to come so far on a job like this. I only came from Warwick and I had cousins to meet me, and I thought I was a heroine! Why didn't you write to someone? — Father Blake or Miss Rourke — and get them to get you fixed up before you came? It's very hard to get a place in a hurry with such small money. Will they help you from home?"

"No," said Anne decisively. "I'll have to manage on my salary."

Miss Rogers frowned and pondered. "Tell you what I'll do," she said after a pause. "We could go round and see Mrs. Tubb, where I used to stay before I came here. She's awfully nice and she might take you on for the time being, say a week or so, until you can look around."

"Thank you very much," said Anne gratefully. She was overwhelmed with sudden longing to reach her journey's end at least for today.

"It's awfully hard on that money," pursued Miss Rogers. "They all want in or about a pound now." She continued to wrench the basting threads out of the material. "I'll go 'round with you to Mrs. Tubb."

"I see you're busy," said Anne apologetically, "and I don't like to bring you out. Couldn't I find the place myself and tell her you sent me?"

"Oh, you could. But then she mightn't take you and

we'd have to try somewhere else. You'll have to sleep somewhere tonight. We'd better go right away.”

Miss Rogers folded her sewing and laid it on the table. Without further comment, she stepped out of the huge, ungainly carpet slippers she was wearing and buttoned on a pair of outdoor shoes, changed her coat-overall for a tweed coat, and pulled on a beret. Either silence was her fashion or she had no information to impart.

“Have you a much better job now?” ventured Anne.

“Job? Lord, no. I'm going to be married in a month's time.” She suddenly smiled round at Anne as she adjusted her cap, and her sullen face became transfigured in that smile of joy and contentment.

“I was five years at St. Anselm's,” she continued. “And I'm not half glad to leave it, I tell you. It's fair killing to be always fending for yourself.”

This was such heresy against the self-dependence creed in which Anne had been nurtured that she could think of nothing to say. They left the house and went hastening along the road back to the main traffic route, where the trams went clangng past. The suitcase had grown heavier than ever, but Anne struggled with it manfully, too ashamed of Miss Rogers even to take little rests. They passed the priest's house again and the adjacent church, which Anne observed for the first time. It was a cheerful looking little red-brick structure, that might have been mistaken for a garage if it were not for the cross on the top of the façade. Innumerable small side roads, all exactly alike, led off from the main road on either side. Anne wondered how the people distinguished one road from another. But her mind went back to her own problems, and she ventured to ask her silent companion:

“Is it nice at St. Anselm’s?”

“Nice! Depends on what you mean by that! I hated it like poison at first, but after a year or so I got used to it, and now I’m very glad to be done with it.”

“You spoke of a Miss Rourke,” Anne went on. “Who is she?”

“Miss Rourke is the head, and a great friend of Father Blake’s.”

“Is she agreeable?”

Miss Rogers gave a short laugh, as though surprised at Anne’s naïveté.

“She’s all right, just if you know how to stand up to her. I did. We had a fine bust-up when I left last Monday. She wanted me to stay on until you came. But my month’s notice was finished, and I have all my clothes to get ready before I go back home, and I want to have a fortnight at home. I think Miss Rourke would have liked me to go to the altar from St. Anselm’s.”

They had turned down a side road and Miss Rogers knocked at one of the doors. It was opened by a fat, comfortable little bundle of a woman, who greeted her with real friendliness.

“I want to speak to you a minute,” said Miss Rogers.

“Come in. Come in, my dears, do. I’m delighted to see you, Miss Rogers.”

Mrs. Tubb, with a trundling gait, led the way into her back sitting room. It was poorly furnished but scrupulously clean and a cheerful fire burned in the grate. She indicated a black horsehair sofa drawn up to one side of the fire, and the girls sat down on it, while she herself sank into a cane rocking chair, in which she swayed gently as she folded her hands on her lap and prepared to listen. Anne

took an instant liking to this woman whose countenance was the most cheerful she had seen since leaving Pallas-grange. She was a clean tidy body with a flat button of a nose and small eyes lost in jolly creases.

“This is Miss Farrelly,” began Miss Rogers, and Anne started. It was the first time in her life she had heard herself so described. She had been Anne all her life until that moment.

“She has just come over from Ireland to take my job teaching at St. Anselm’s. She hasn’t fixed to stay anywhere. Do you think you could take her, Mrs. Tubb?”

“Eh, dear, I ’adn’t meant to take no one no more. An’ now our Bert is plannin’ to come ’ome next week for a ’oliday. You know he’s earnin’ fine wages now an’ ’e’s so good to me an’ all, I didn’t feel I wanted to put ’im into the little spare room leading into the bathroom. An’ Will says to me, ‘e says, ‘well, why not put ’im in the back spare.’ So I did, an’ I ’ad it all ready for ’im since yesterday. I ’adn’t meant to take lodgers no more,” she repeated. “My asthma was that bad all winter, I just didn’t feel I wanted any more work. . . . An’ that’s ’ow it is. . . .”

“Too bad,” said Miss Rogers briskly. “Well, do you know anyone round here who’d take Miss Farrelly? What about Mrs. Adams?”

“Eh, dear, no chance there,” Mrs. Tubb shook her head. “Three children now, you know, and another due any day. She couldn’t do it, the poor woman. She really couldn’t.” There was a look of distress on Mrs. Tubb’s pink, shiny face, as her kindly eyes rested on Anne.

“You’ve come an awful long way,” she said gently. “You ’ave indeed, poor lass. An’ the money will be that small, ’twill be ’ard to do on it. . . .”

“Seventeen shillings a week,” said Miss Rogers, who seemed to take relish in repeating the sum. “She could only pay about fifteen shillings, as she’d want two for herself.”

“Indeed she would, the poor lass,” assented Mrs. Tubb. “I dunno ’ow she could do on that same. Let me think now. . . .” She swayed gently in her chair and pursed her lips, her eyes travelling over Anne perplexedly.

“Tell you what I’ll do,” she said finally. “I’ll talk it over with Will when ’e comes ’ome tonight. You stop ’ere with me, dearie, for a couple o’ days any’ow, and if Will don’t care for it, I’ll get you fixed up some’ow near school. After all, Bert won’t want the room for a week, and it’s all ready like.”

Her motherly heart could not shut itself to the young stranger. Anne’s ingenuous face expressed the full measure of her relief. Hungry and tired as she was, she shrank from facing the roads again with her suitcase.

Miss Rogers rose with alacrity.

“Thanks very much,” she said gratefully. “You’re a brick, Mrs. Tubb. Well, you’ll look after Miss Farrelly now, and I’ll be running along.” She made her farewells hastily and the front door banged behind her. Anne never saw her again.

“Come along now, dearie,” said Mrs. Tubb. “I’ll show you where you can sleep tonight anyways until I can think a bit and talk things over with Will. This is the room I ’ad ready for our lad. ’E was all through the war, but now ’e ’as a real good berth in a Manchester office. ’E’s a draughtsman,” she explained impressively. “ ’E ’asn’t been ’ome for nigh on a year now, and we’re that pleased that ’e’s comin’”

The bedroom was small and poorly furnished but, like the room below, quite clean. A little window gave on to the backyard, which consisted of about ten by six feet of sooty concrete, bounded on its three sides by black paling that divided it from neighbours' yards. Not only were there yards to right and left, but there was a vista of yards directly in front also, where the backs of another row of houses adjoined them. As Anne deposited her suitcase in the window recess, she had a momentary glimpse of this novelty.

Meanwhile Mrs. Tubb was surveying the room with pardonable pride. There was a fresh cloth on the dressing table and a pink and gold china trinket set arrayed on the cloth. On the brass bedstead, the bed was neatly turned down. The linoleum gleamed and a smell of fresh floor polish pervaded the room. A picture of the Sacred Heart and a holy-water font gave it, in Anne's eyes, a homely touch.

“It's lovely,” she murmured.

Mrs. Tubb looked gratified. “And now,” she said briskly, “we'll 'ave tea, eh dearie?”

Anne attended to her toilet in a sober mood. This humble milieu into which she had dropped was in forceful contrast with the radiant environment of her dreams. Was her new life in Mallingford to be a series of such unpleasant surprises, and would she find within herself the power of self-adjustment?

Chapter Two

ON THE first morning of her teaching career, Anne set out at a commendably early hour. As she walked the short distance to the school, she asked herself anxiously what would be expected of her. "Will they simply push me in before the children," she thought, "and close the door behind me? I won't know what to say."

The school was only a five minutes' walk from her lodgings. Mrs. Tubb had explained to her how to find it, but the noise of children playing was anyhow a sufficient guide. St. Anselm's did not in the least correspond with her dream picture: it was a low red-brick building, with blistered woodwork that gave it a shabby and abject appearance. It stood in a concreted enclosure separated from the road by a high wooden palisade, once probably creosoted black, but now faded to a streaky grey. A much-abused wooden gate, swinging crazily from broken hinges, led into a yard crowded with boys and girls. Their ages ranged from four to twelve, and they were completely absorbed in their games, running hither and thither, shrieking noisily and laughing. When Anne entered the yard and crossed to the school door, they took no notice, being fully preoccupied with their play.

The school door was locked. Apparently none of the teachers had arrived yet. Anne stood nervously surveying the playground, an ill-defined apprehension making her

heart beat faster. She could not disguise from herself the fact that Mallingford was proving a disappointment. The conditions of life here were hardly likely to be attractive. After a few moments, she summoned up courage to thread her way through the children and make a circuit of the building. At the back of it was a shed, roofed with corrugated iron, one half of which apparently served as a bicycle shelter; the other half contained three lavatories, each provided with a wooden seat falling asunder from age; the air in the shed was unspeakably foul, and the floor very dirty. She resumed her tour of inspection, but there was nothing else to be seen. The children were beginning to notice her now and were whispering among themselves. Some of them smiled at her with timid friendliness but no one offered a greeting.

Presently a woman hurried through the gate and passed like a grey streak through the children, dragging from her pocket a large key by means of which she entered the school. Though Anne was now standing by the door, she appeared not to see her. She had grey hair, a grey face, a long grey coat, misshapen shoes, black woollen stockings, and a grey felt hat jammed on her straggling hair.

Anne followed her in and touched her arm.

“I’m the new teacher,” she introduced herself. “Anne Farrelly is my name.”

“Oh, mercy, I’m glad you’re here,” was the other’s greeting, as she tore off her hat and coat and flung them against a peg.

“Y’know, Miss Rogers is gone a week, and it’s been fair awful, all of us taking the babies with our own kids, such muddle and confusion. *Naow then, naow then . . .*” the latter in a menacing shriek to some few children who had

put their heads in the door. The children precipitately scattered.

“You’re there at that end,” continued Miss Bury. (Anne learned later that such was her name.) She waved her hand vaguely toward a wooden gallery immediately inside the door.

“And there’s a timetable hanging up there,” another vague wave. “You ought to look at it. If it’s Nature, there won’t be the specimens prob’ly, and you’d better do something else instead. It’s the same for all.”

While she was giving these cryptic instructions, Miss Bury was charging about the school with a sort of savage energy and desperate haste, banging and flapping about her like a mechanical robot that had just been wound up. Having applied a match to the fire, laid in readiness, she unlocked the teachers’ desks (there were four of them), and slapped out from the depths of each, sundry notebooks, pens, cigarette tins full of coloured chalks, and folded dusters. Then she dragged the blackboards into position and hauled out books from the cupboards. Anne soberly removed her coat and hat and hung them next to Miss Bury’s.

The timetable was a large chart showing, under each day of the week, the different subjects taught during every hour, or half hour, of the pupils’ day. Anne frowned at it. She could hardly take in its meaning, so amazed was she by Miss Bury’s ugliness. She had never seen anyone so hopelessly ugly. This teacher was as bad as the witch in a fairy tale. A tall woman, with bony shoulders and a flat chest, her greying hair, that was coarse and greasy, was dragged back into a heavy, untidy bun, and held in position with two enormous hairpins. She had a large nose

and two small, close-set eyes. There was not a vestige of colour in her face, which was both pimpled and pitted with enlarged pores and blackheads. Her teeth were bad and her lips putty coloured.

“Naow then, naow then,” this in another strident yell to the intruding children. They scattered again and Miss Bury threw a sort of agonized glance upward at the school clock, seized a huge hand bell that stood in the window ledge and rushed outside with it, jangling it with ferocious purpose.

The voices in the playground were suddenly hushed, and there was a shuffling of feet as the children formed into line. Anne experienced a sinking of heart. Her dream was shattered. This was a most dismal environment. She looked around the interior and took in its details.

The children’s cloakroom was directly inside the entrance and ran the whole length of the building. An inner door led into a long room with a bare wooden floor, sadly in need of scrubbing. The infants’ gallery occupied one third of this room, and that the remainder was divided into two classes was indicated by the arrangement of the little double desks. Two long poles running across under the ceiling and dusty red repp curtains now pushed back against the wall showed how the three classes were separated. There were two tall narrow windows at each end of the building, and three similar windows down the side opposite the entrance. Each of the seven window ledges was graced with a dusty aspidistra, the earthenware pot draped in red crepe paper. The walls were panelled half way up with pitch pine, and distempered in green above the panelling, but the distemper was old and cracked and the walls flaked a constant white dust that settled deject-

edly on the plant leaves. There was only one fireplace in the long room, behind the teacher's desk in the centre. This arrangement meant that the babies occupied the coldest and most draughty division of the room.

Outside in the yard, Miss Bury was shrieking frenzied commands. Anne went to the door and looked on. The children had formed themselves into a long double line, and the teacher was prancing about in front of them, holding the bell by its tongue, and glaring at the pupils:

“In line. Keep step.”

“Naow then, naow then . . .”

“Tommy Robinson, I'll give it you. . . . My word!”

“'Ere you, Ethel Walton, wot you mean?”

“I'll give it you . . .”

Anne thought amusedly that it was a pedagogic method quite beyond her. She would never be able to mimic it.

Another woman, older than Miss Bury, came hastening through the gate. She was small and thin, rather well dressed, with a wrinkled puckered face, broken teeth, and a mole on her cheek. She held out her hand to Anne with a friendly smile:

“You're Miss Farrelly, I s'pose. How d'y you do? Milner's my name. . . .” She scarcely paused for the handshake, but hurried on into the school.

Meanwhile Miss Bury was bawling:

“Keep step! Keep step!”

Tapping with the tongue of the bell a sort of cautionary rhythm to which the children marched, Miss Bury preceded them into the building. There were about a hundred pupils, boys and girls, and the majority, according to Pallasgrange standards, were well dressed and tidy. They were rosy-cheeked now from their play. They filed around

the cloakroom in orderly fashion, depositing their outdoor clothes, before passing to their respective divisions. When the last straggler was tucked into place, Miss Milner addressed the whole school:

“Good morning, children.”

She scarcely raised her voice, in pleasing contrast with Miss Bury.

“Good morning, Miss Mil-ner,” they chanted. They remained standing by their desks until she had recited morning prayers, after which they sat down.

The roll was called. Anne was surprised by the preponderance of Irish names. O’s and Mac’s, Seans and Maureens abounded. The moment the list ended, Miss Bury leaped at her curtain and jangled it across.

“*Naow then, naow then.*” She occupied the other end of the room and her stridency was slightly muffled by the curtain. Miss Milner strolled toward the second curtain and pulled it across. She nodded over her shoulder to Anne:

“I’ll be with you in a minute, when I get these to work.” Anne resolved to model her teaching manner on Miss Milner’s quiet authoritative way.

Meanwhile she found it hard to repress a smile as she looked at her class, staring at her with round-eyed expectation. Ranging in age from four to six, their demeanour was clearly a reflection of their late teacher’s method. Evidently she had exacted discipline. Carefully spaced out, they sat one behind the other, their little feet pressed together, their crossed hands resting on the long desk in front, their chins up, their backs painfully erect. “They can’t keep this up for long,” thought Anne.

“Well, children,” she began uncertainly in a coaxing

voice, "I'm sure that we're going to be very good friends. . . ."

The door behind her opened and all the children jerked to their feet as though a wire had been pulled.

"Good morning, Miss Rourke," they chanted.

"Morning," a hurried voice answered. Anne caught a glimpse of a fur coat disappearing through the curtains. This must be the headmistress. She braced herself.

"We're going to do arithmetic now," she announced to her solemn-eyed class.

"Numbers, teacher?" suggested a little fellow in the front row, darting his fist to his forelock, like a cabby acknowledging a tip.

"Numbers," Anne agreed.

"Pleath, teacher, may I get the ballth out?" suggested a little girl with a pronounced lisp.

"Oh, thank you," said Anne.

(So arithmetic was called numbers when taught in the kindergarten, and one did it with balls.)

The little girl who had volunteered help stepped primly from her seat and opened a cupboard behind Anne's desk. It was crammed with teaching apparatus, the purpose of which she could but dimly guess. The child, however, rummaged confidently and then dragged out from the depths a cardboard box full of coloured woollen balls, which she presented to Anne.

The repp curtains were swept aside and a tall, full-bosomed woman, dressed in a black knitted suit, stepped through them. The class of infants over whom a touch of relaxation had passed, stiffened again, and were about to jerk to their feet, when she stopped them with an authoritative gesture.

“Good morning,” she said abruptly to Anne, her manner so staccato that the greeting sounded like a rebuke, giving her at the same time a keenly appraising look and a wintry smile. She did not offer to shake hands. Evidently the comings and goings of pupil teachers were only a minor incident in her life.

“I’ll give you a demonstration lesson now,” she said. With large graceful hands, she ranged the coloured balls in sets of five on the desk in front of her, and put the class through a lesson in numbers up to five: counting, addition, and subtraction. Her exposition had the lucid simplicity born of long experience. She maintained an iron discipline. The children seemed very much in awe of her and, while she stood before them, they never relaxed from their rigid posture, singing out the answers promptly, either together or singly, as she demanded. She kept their attention focussed and their brains active.

Anne stood beside the desk, submissively watching. Miss Rourke must have been at one time an extraordinarily handsome woman, but now that she declined toward the fifties, her face was marred by fatigue and discontent. Her greying hair was plaited in a becoming crown around her head, but under her eyes, so bleak and contemptuous in expression, there were heavy pouches. Her colour was still fresh, but a network of innumerable lines and wrinkles was stamped upon her face. She had a long nose, with fine, disdainful nostrils and a severe mouth.

Later that day, when she was having her dinner in Myrtle Avenue, Anne discussed Miss Rourke with Mrs. Tubb:

“Eh, dearie, yes. She’s a bit ‘aughty like, surely,” said Mrs. Tubb consolingly, in answer to Anne’s comments.

But further than that, the old landlady would not go. Miss Rourke had taught little Bertie Tubb, for she had been reigning at St. Anselm's for twenty years. And Anne discovered that Mrs. Tubb prodigiously admired Miss Rourke as a model of feminine capability.

The afternoon session of the school was an ordeal. Anne was handicapped by not yet knowing the names of her little pupils. She was giving them an object lesson and was supposed to elicit replies. In order to escape from her difficulty about names, she addressed them jocosely:

“Tell me now, you little girl with the green bow . . .” or

“Answer you, boy, in the third row with the freckle on his nose . . .”

This was an entirely new game to the children. They craned eagerly to look at each other and verify Anne's descriptive efforts, their little faces puckered with amusement, laughter bubbling from them. They had been sitting in such stiff rigidity all day, Anne was inclined to indulge them.

But Miss Rourke's head came through the curtains. She was in such a bad temper that her face looked livid.

“*Miss Farrelly*, will you *please* remember that there is a class trying to concentrate here?”

Or if Anne raised her voice ever so little, the head would be poked through again:

“*Miss Farrelly*, tut-tut, *do* spare your voice. It will have to last you years and years remember. Think what you'll have left of it in a few years' time if you abuse it like that!”
(H'm, thought Anne rebelliously, Miss Bury's seems to wear well enough!)

Or if she had fallen into an easy, confidential tone, perfectly audible to the children, but not too intrusive on

the other side of the curtain, Miss Rourke would poke through a derisive eye:

“Speak up, speak up, my dear. You can’t hold their attention with that tone, you know. Miss Rogers had them in very good order. Don’t lose all the effect of her work now.”

Clearly it was difficult, if not impossible, to please Miss Rourke. To Anne she became a sort of hidden fury, always liable to bound through the curtains with a reprimand, an injunction, or instructions, shattering Anne’s momentary pleasure in her little child audience; or, just as the pupil teacher was acquiring a little self-confidence, making her feel uncertain and wretched. She admired the docility of her pupils under such circumstances.

The school had not a happy atmosphere. Miss Rourke was a shirker, arriving late every morning and leaving early. She took no class. Miss Milner taught the upper class occupying the central division of the school. While the classes were in progress, Miss Rourke sat at her desk by the fire, occupied with correspondence. On very rare occasions she took the upper class off Miss Milner’s hands for half an hour. Miss Milner was a sycophant, who toadied to her, and whom she favoured in a contemptuous kind of way. All the drudgery of the school fell on the unfortunate Miss Bury. She took the two upper classes together for drill, Catechism, and singing, while Miss Rourke and Miss Milner enjoyed a quiet chat over the fire. At drill, particularly, Miss Bury’s energy would become more intimidatingly ferocious, as she galloped up and down before sixty children, perspiring freely, the stridency of her “naow then, naow then,” nearly raising the roof. Poor Miss Bury! She lived in absolute terror of

the headmistress, by whom she was openly despised and consistently bullied.

Anne knew in a short while that she cordially detested the head, but she refused to be disheartened by her, and hardly a day passed that the pair did not cross swords, one determined not to be cowed and the other determined to enforce her tyrannical rule.

“Is discipline so very important?” Anne scornfully asked one day, at the conclusion of one of Miss Rourke’s usual harangues. “I don’t think it is, you know, where children under six are concerned. I’ll guarantee to control them, but discipline . . .”

Miss Rourke glared at her.

“Will you please remember, Miss Farrelly,” she said stormily, “that you’re not a trained teacher, and therefore not qualified to express such opinions. Where there are three classes numbering one hundred children, and only curtains between them, there is nothing more important than discipline!”

Since Anne was training for the teaching profession, she had to make preparatory notes on a certain number of her lessons, such as those on Nature Study, and enter the notes in an exercise book specially provided for the purpose by the educational authorities. She had to submit this notebook every week to Miss Rourke, who glanced through it superciliously and rarely made any comment. But one day when the subject of the notes happened to be *Chrysanthemums*, Anne had written under the heading *Perfume*, the comment *None*. Miss Rourke crossed this out and wrote over it the amendment, *Spicy Smell*. She pointed her finger ominously to the correction as she replaced the exercise on Anne’s desk.

Anne was feeling in a merry mood, and the blue-pencil correction seemed to her not of much moment. Miss Rourke was waiting, so she remarked with a smile, "Well, a spicy smell is not a perfume!"

But Miss Rourke was in particularly bad form and her face darkened.

"Miss Farrelly," she said, in steely tones, "I've taken more impertinence from you than from anyone I've ever had here. If there's any more of it, I'll have to report you. . . ."

Anne's heart tightened, but she forced herself to meet with a level look Miss Rourke's bleak eye.

"I could make a report too," she said quietly.

Miss Rourke swung on her heel, and from that day forth she ceased to interfere with Anne's class. There was never cordiality between them, however, merely their relationship steadied down into a cessation of open hostility.

Before Anne had spent half an hour in St. Anselm's, she knew infallibly and with dreadful misgiving that she was in the wrong place. With a sinking heart, she said to herself, "This will not do for me. It will simply never do." During her first week in Mallingford, she went to bed very early in the evening, because she had nowhere to go and nothing to do, and then found she could not sleep because of the worrying thoughts that beset her. What was she to do?

She could cut and run, of course; in other words, write at once to Aunt Hannah for her fare home and return with all speed to Pallasgrange. But such a course smacked too much of defeat and failure. And what awaited her in Pallasgrange? Drudgery and reproaches, and perhaps a

tedious delay before she could make a fresh start, which might turn out then to be quite as bad as this!

The alternative was to endure St. Anselm's until her year of pupil teaching was completed, and then go on to college. This was the outline of the plan upon which she had agreed with her aunt. But she shrank in dismay from the thought of devoting her life to teaching. It was not so much the discomfort at St. Anselm's that repelled her: those hours of imprisonment at the desk between the repp curtain and the aspidistras, with a critical and hostile ear always following her conduct of the class; the frustrated sense of never having her pupils to herself; and the constant overruling of her discipline. She knew that these conditions were merely local and not inherent to the profession. Her dismay arose from her conviction that the whole business of teaching was uncongenial to her from start to finish. Even if she spent two years in a training college, she was positive that for her there was no cultural value in such work, no opportunity for true development, or self-fulfilment. She felt it to be in some obscure way humiliating and dwarfing. She would never ask her college fees now from Aunt Hannah. She would give up teaching and try something else. But how? She had not a single penny to tide her over such a change.

After some weeks, she made up her mind that she would go in for secretarial training, and endure St. Anselm's until she was qualified to take a post in an office. One good feature about the schoolwork was that she finished with it every day at four o'clock, and her Saturdays were free. After some inquiry, she discovered a secretarial college in the city, where they gave night classes at an astoundingly cheap rate. The quarterly fees worked out at something

like one shilling a night. Anne began to attend these classes two nights weekly. When she had scraped up the fees out of her monthly cheque, she found she had nothing left for tram fares. This meant she had to walk the three miles into the city and home again. She walked therefore — walked valiantly through the fresh suburban roads, with their green strips of grass at either side, and then less enthusiastically through the foul slums that intervened like a sore in the city's side between Falmount and the centre.

She met, as class fellows in this secretarial college, girls rather younger than herself, who had come from comfortable homes, and who were much more intent on passing the time agreeably than on acquiring proficiency, earning their living, or becoming independent. Their fees had been paid by hopeful parents, but the girls themselves were mostly bored and unwilling to learn. During the lessons, they giggled and whispered endlessly, or passed round snapshots and post cards. When they tried to include Anne in their little diversions, she stonily rejected their advances. She felt that they were little irresponsibles, that she was old enough to be their grandmother, and that the weight of the world had fallen on her. (She was not yet eighteen.) After some weeks of trial her class fellows decided that she was a dreadful bore, and they left her severely alone, which was just what she wanted.

The principal of this college, who did most of the teaching in the evening, was an elderly woman, with a plain, kind face. She noticed far more than Anne suspected: the almost grim application, the gravity compared with the other girls, the muddy shoes. One evening, when the girls were leaving at the conclusion of classes, she drew Anne

aside and conducted her to an empty room at the end of the corridor, where she switched on the light.

“This is my private office,” she explained. “I never use it after five o’clock every day. If you care to come in any time after that, for an extra evening or two during the week, and practice on my typewriter, you are perfectly free to do so, without any additional charge. You’ve probably noticed that shorthand and typing are really dreadfully simple. They are only a matter of practice. You could master them in a month if you could cram in sufficient practice.”

Anne then began a period of phenomenal application. Instead of walking into town two nights a week, she walked in five nights, regardless of the weather. She devoted the whole of her Saturdays to the study of commercial French. On Sundays, she went to early Mass and spent the rest of the day poring over the theory of shorthand and practising the hieroglyphics. She had no relaxation. She worked under conditions of discomfort that only youth and good health could overcome. She had no fire in her bedroom and, considering the weekly sum she was paying Mrs. Tubb, she could not ask for such a luxury. To keep out the cold, she wrapped herself in the blankets off the bed. There was only the toilet table to write on; it was too low for comfort and made her back ache after a few hours. As she had to give Mrs. Tubb some explanation of the long hours she spent in her room, she confided her ambitions to her landlady. She expected some encouragement, and perhaps a little admiration, but the reaction was disappointing. Mrs. Tubb appeared to be shocked. She swayed in her rocking chair as she gave her views:

“Eh, dearie, what would your good aunt say, Miss Far-

rely? Teachers are ladies, you know, but typewriters ain’t. No, indeed, bold little chits the most of ‘em. They ‘aven’t ‘ad your training. Weren’t you all your life at a ‘igh-class convent school? Well, then, you’re leaving your own class to go into a lower one. I don’t think that’s right, I don’t indeed. And offices are queer places. You’d want to be very careful. The people that’s going now are very bad.”

The loneliness of Anne’s life was extreme. On the nights she went to college to practise typing, she saw or spoke to no one. She left Mrs. Tubb’s after tea, walked to town, practised on the typewriter for two hours, and walked her three miles back again, in an absolutely unbroken silence.

But the result of this intensive application was that she finished a six months’ secretarial course in two months. Before she had completed one term, she was ready to sit for the diploma awarded by the college at the end of each three-term course. The principal told her this with a curious look. “You must be very fond of the work,” she commented.

Anne was silent. The truth was that she despised it. Shorthand — a mechanical wielding of foolish hieroglyphics, symbols for a shockingly mutilated language in which words are dismembered and phrases disjointed. As for typewriting: she wrote by touch, eyes glued to the sheet from which she copied, flexible and nimble fingers flying, wrist dexterous in guiding mechanically the paper on which she wrote. But the brain simply never functioned in these acquirements. And commercial French, how very commercial it was: a stock of well-worn phrases, like *agréez nos salutations empressées*, that seemed the most miserable trifling, the most foolish little snippet of knowledge when one reflected that the great world of

French literature was still unexplored by her, that world with its resounding names of Corneille, Molière, Racine, and the whole noble land of France with its inscrutable face and its baffling history. Moreover, she was sickened by the hugger-mugger of Big Business, and by the inflated pomposity of the “commercial training” textbooks, so absurd in their pretentiousness. Surely this commercial ramp was the lie of the age. Anne had nothing but contempt for her new-found competency. But whenever she was tempted to slacken her efforts, or if her resolution momentarily wavered, she was goaded by Miss Rourke’s bleak eye, Miss Bury’s repulsive ugliness and frenzied energy, or Miss Milner’s forced and faded smile.

After three months’ service, the educational authorities raised her salary to one pound a week. This considerably eased the pressure. She immediately increased Mrs. Tubb’s allowance to 17s.6d. and herself luxuriated in an occasional tram ride home from the city when the weather was bad. But she had hardly begun to enjoy these easier conditions when two new events conspired almost to plunge her in despair.

It occurred to someone in the educational office to scrutinise her papers, apparently for the first time, and it was found that her pass marks in the subject of arithmetic did not reach the requirements of the Board for the post she filled. She received a letter telling her that she must be prepared to sit at such and such a centre at a given date so as to submit to re-examination in the subject of arithmetic of matriculation standard. Deeply distressed, Anne showed this communication to the principal of the commercial college and asked her what she should do. “Isn’t it awful?” she confided. “I just want to hold this

teaching job until I get the commercial diploma, and yet for the sake of a few weeks, here I have to waste time and money swotting at arithmetic again.”

The principal studied the letter in silence for a moment. Then she consoled Anne. She told her where the examination centre was: in the next street, in fact. She pointed out that arithmetic would not come amiss afterwards in office work, and said that one of the teachers in the day school would take her on for the extra coaching every Saturday morning. This was arranged. Anne's new tutor proved to be an elderly, gentle man, mild and lucid in his teaching. Rapidly he guided her through a revision of matriculation arithmetic. She passed the examination in due time. But not before she had lost seven or eight of her precious Saturday mornings from the commercial course she was so bent on completing.

Just as she had arranged about the arithmetic lessons, another blow fell. Miss Rourke came through the curtains one morning with a smile in her wintry eye. She told Anne she had just heard from the school manager, Father Blake, that they would have to hold a fete (in aid of the school funds) during the last week of the summer term. She, Miss Rourke, was already arranging the programme. Some pupils from the school would have to dance, and Miss Rourke suggested that Anne should pick out a group from the babies' class and teach them step dancing, perhaps the Irish four-hand reel, or the jig, would be suitable.

“But I don't know these dances,” Anne immediately objected.

“Neither do any of us,” snapped Miss Rourke. “But dancing just must be included. You're the youngest among us, and so it behooves you to learn it. You have a lot of

free time and it won't do you any harm. I will give you the address of a good teacher in the neighbourhood. Make arrangements with her to teach you a few steps in which you can coach the children. Just one dance would do."

Anne could not but agree that if one of the four teachers in St. Anselm's had to do this thing, she was the person indicated. She rippled with inward laughter at the notion of Miss Rourke's ponderous form hopping and skipping through the intricate evolutions of the Irish jig, or the rhythms of the four-hand reel; and as for poor Miss Bury, or the sedate Miss Milner . . .

She sent a post card to the teacher whose address Miss Rourke had given her, a Miss Hodgson who, in response, called on Anne a few evenings later. An Irishwoman, jolly, elderly, and a drill teacher by profession, she was reminiscent of a sparrow, so small was she, her withered face was so brown and she hopped so industriously for a livelihood. On five or six successive Saturday afternoons she came to give Anne the necessary lessons. Then Mrs. Tubb's dining-room table would be pushed aside and Miss Hodgson would perform the Irish jig and reel, whistling the time for herself with immense zest and jollity, Mrs. Tubb swaying softly in her rocking chair, a delighted and encouraging spectator. Anne would follow her teacher through the mazes of the steps, flinging out her pointed toe, springing and capering, with an appearance of gaiety in the strangest contrast with the rage and rebellion in her heart. (Such a waste of precious Saturdays, both morning and afternoon gone now, and all to hold a miserable job not worth the holding!) The little house in Myrtle Avenue vibrated with the unaccustomed strain on its floor when Miss Hodgson took Anne's hand, holding it high in the

air as she guided her through the mazes of the dance. The exercise made Anne very breathless in spite of her slimness, because she knew nothing about breath control and received her first lesson in it from Miss Hodgson.

In the intervals between the dancing lessons, Anne had no time to practise the steps. She was flogged with work. Her Sundays had to be given up to commercial French exercises. Moreover there was no room in her bedroom for such capers. But on her walks backwards and forwards to the city, she would go over the steps in her mind, memorizing the whole maze: *one-two-three-four-five-six-seven*. Sometimes, on her walk home, she would pause at some deserted byroad and rapidly run through them, humming the melody. Occasionally, she went wrong and could not remember; then she would repeat, striving to recapture the correct evolution, her strenuous humming growing louder, her pattering steps ringing on the flagged pavement, until the approaching steady tramp of a policeman, or the raising of a blind in a near-by window, warned her that she was behaving oddly in the street of an English city.

Mrs. Tubb had a strong inkling of Anne's difficulties and admired her prodigiously. Her liking for the girl was instantaneous, and though she grumbled occasionally at the small sum she was receiving weekly, she would not allow her to look elsewhere for lodgings. Mrs. Tubb was an excellent cook and an admirable little housekeeper, full of such contriving ways that she probably made profit out of Anne, even when she was receiving only fifteen shillings a week. All the food she provided was wholesome and good, but it was rather exiguous in quantity. Especially at night time, Anne was often uncomfortably

hungry. She had her tea at half-past five every evening. This meal usually consisted of a square of fried bread, tea and bread and butter, with perhaps a spoonful of jam; occasionally a kipper, and rarely an egg was substituted for the fried bread. This was a satisfying meal, but when she had done two hours' work in the college and walked for this purpose a total of six miles, her appetite revived. She would have liked something when she arrived back home, even half a glass of milk would have sufficed, but nothing was ever offered. That was the point at which Mrs. Tubb had to economise. Anne became quite familiar with the sensation of going to bed hungry. The worst feature of this was that Mrs. Tubb's husband worked evening shifts in a factory from which he got home very late. He always seemed to be having his supper just about the time Anne was going to bed. Her room was over the kitchen, and just as she was dropping off to sleep, delicious odours floated up to tantalise her: the penetrating aroma of savoury stews or good gravy, or delicious hotpots and pies.

Anne's only friend was Mrs. Tubb. She never made another in Mallingford. It was really fortunate that she was so preoccupied with work, for she had not time to consider her state of loneliness, or the social ostracism in which she lived. She was only dimly aware of conditions that faintly shadowed her native optimism. Miss Rourke was Irish, too, enjoying an income of over three hundred a year, which enabled her to live in good rooms in the best residential part of the city. Both Miss Bury and Miss Milner were living in their own homes. Yet none of the three ever extended any sort of an invitation to Anne, or made any suggestion about her social life. Moreover,

she never saw the interior of a restaurant, or a cinema, or a theatre while she was in Mallingford. For seven months, she lived absolutely without relaxation from which she was debarred both by poverty and by the relentless pressure of necessity.

She often marvelled at the wizardry of her finances. She did not know how she managed to pay everyone: Mrs. Tubb, the Secretarial College, the arithmetic tutor, the dancing mistress. All these fees happened to be moderate and she just managed to pay them, sometimes keeping one debtor waiting, while she appeased the other. When she had passed the required examination in arithmetic, her salary was again raised to twenty-two and six-pence a week. Clothes and especially footwear, had become by this time a pressing problem. She replenished them, but the expenditure made dreadful holes in her monthly cheque, forcing her once again to puzzle over pence. Thus if she kept some pennies for Mass, she would have none for a tram ride or for a bun to appease hunger at bedtime.

The warm breath of summer brought relief to the schoolwork. First Miss Milner began to take the senior class outdoors, her pupils sitting on benches in one corner of the yard. About a week later, Miss Bury, on Miss Rourke's instructions, began to take her class into the opposite corner of the playground. Anne now had the schoolroom to herself, except that Miss Rourke was usually seated at her desk, working at accounts, school correspondence, and personal letters. She seemed to write a great number of letters, and she wrote them all during school hours. For several months now, she had not once interfered with Anne. The truce between them held. Anne,

however, did not ask permission to take her pupils out of doors. She longed to do so, but she could not bring herself to ask permission. Then one day, probably when Miss Rourke had grown tired of waiting for Anne to ask leave, she told her to take the babies to the park, that such was the custom at St. Anselm's, because they would distract the others in the yard.

Delightedly Anne set off with her little charges. The park was about ten minutes' walk from the school. It was only an apology for a park, merely fifteen acres or so of exhausted-looking grass, with a few elms and sycamores dotted about, and a black cindered path surrounding the whole expanse, which was further enclosed by a high green paling.

The walk to this haven through traffic-ridden streets was not so pleasant. Although Anne placed her most reliable pupils at the top and tail of the queue, thirty little beings aged between four and six are only with great difficulty persuaded to walk at an even pace in crocodile form. Either they broke into a run in their excitement, or they straggled out of line, or they came to a dead stop to gape at something, or they even got lost altogether. Anne, on her first day out with them, found that she had to keep dashing from one end of the line to the other, expostulating, warning, and threatening, until she felt she was behaving exactly like Miss Bury. The passersby, however, seemed to think it a pleasing spectacle and smiled at her encouragingly. It was hot, dusty work. Grocers' boys saw her predicament and added to her confusion by jeering: “Hey, teacher, this one's nose wants wiping,” or passed other remarks less printable, or they made the sound of kissing. Even the policeman on point duty

grinned behind his hand at her confusion. But after a few days' practice the children's behaviour on the streets greatly improved. Also, when they understood what the park was like, they began to share their teacher's enthusiasm to reach it quickly.

The fresh air, the sunshine, and the freedom from supervision, seemed glorious to Anne. Every day, when they reached the grass, her eyes danced and her face broke into smiles. The children noticed the difference in her expression and fought passionately for the honour of catching her hand. She ran races with them to the trees, and there they would lie on their backs, staring up at the pattern of blue showing through the sycamore flowers, in which the bees were murmuring with greedy rapture. Swallows darted overhead, with a flash of white breasts; cool breezes fanned the children's heated faces. There were no formal lessons in the park, no obligation on the children to sit up perfectly straight, no shouting, no threats. Anne taught them all that she knew herself about the world of nature around them; or she told them fairy stories with endless zest; or she played games with a merry abandon unknown in the playground; or she simply sat apart with a dreamy look of peace on her face, while they grouped themselves quietly around her, swooping treasures and chattering. Anne thoroughly enjoyed these outdoor afternoons, for she genuinely loved her little pupils, and she delighted in indulging them when removed from the dispiriting effect of the red curtains.

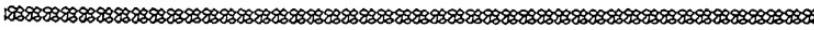
Sometimes fond mammas and elder sisters, also out for a breath of air, would walk around the cinder path and pause admiringly to view “the school.” The children never showed any desire to join their relations, merely smiling

at them with a self-conscious air of superiority. The parents would tell Mrs. Tubb of this marvel, and she repeated their gossip to Anne over tea, swaying gently in her chair:

"Eh, dearie, they don't know 'ow you do it, that they don't. Mrs. Adams, she says to me, she says, 'Our Tommy, well 'e's a limb if ever there was one. When 'e comes 'ome, 'e turns the 'ouse upside down; he's fair awful. And to see 'im sittin' there on 'is 'eels like an angel, gazing up at the teacher, and 'e 'ardly pretended 'e knew me when we passed.' And Mrs. Moore, she says to me, 'Well, I declare Mrs. Tubb, I've three of 'em, and I can't manage 'em, so I can't. They'll do nothing I tell 'em. And when I see that there Miss Farrelly with thirty of 'em around 'er, or followin' 'er around like pet lambs . . .' They *do* wonder at you, that they do."

Anne laughed. Those summer afternoons in the park were the only fair memory she was to conserve of Mallingford.

Three weeks before the school was due to break up for the summer holidays, she held in her hand the imposing parchment which was the diploma from the secretarial college. Immediately she began buying the best of the daily papers and answering likely advertisements of clerical positions. Unsubdued by her experience, her optimism soared again as she prepared to face the unknown.



Chapter Three

*POPOLO D'ITALIA. Signori, Signori! Popolo d'Italia.
Eccoci, eccoci, Signori. Po-po-lo d'Italia.*

A terrific uproar had suddenly broken out in the depths of the street already so noisy with the babel of voices, the shuffling trudge of feet, the insistent clanging of trams, and the blaring of motor claxons. Anne peered down from her room on the top floor of the Milanese hotel. She was so high up and the street was so incredibly narrow, she could see only the opposite pavement unless she opened the window and leaned out.

But the French window was fastened by a most intricate contrivance which she could not master. Now the sudden outcry in the street below her, the frenzied shouting of many voices, the frantic running and stamping, convinced her that a riot was in progress. Or perhaps it was even more serious — a revolution. Men were running backward and forward across the road, and swaying in groups on the congested pavement on the opposite side. They all seemed to be frantically yelling and bawling the same thing: *Pop — Pop — Pop . . .* What on earth were they shouting? She peered and craned anxiously, and then drew back suddenly with a half-shamed laugh of relief. It was merely the evening paper! It had just come out and there seemed to be a run on it.

She sat down again. She had arrived. She was in Italy.

She had thought that she should have been thrilled and overjoyed past bearing at this point, but somehow she felt very flat. She decided that she must be tired to the point of dejection; yes, that was what it was. She was dreadfully tired.

The past two days had been too crammed with experience and excitement. Everything had happened exactly according to the schedule arranged by the London office, who had appointed her as secretary to the manager of their Milan branch, and who had paid the expenses of her journey first class. Anne had never before travelled in such luxury. She had greatly enjoyed the crossing, Folkestone — Boulogne: the happy-looking fellow travellers, the sea gulls wheeling, the clean wind just ruffling the sea, and the strong sunshine. She had scarcely stepped from the train in Paris when a smooth-faced American appeared to distinguish her as by a miracle from the other passengers, greeted her confidently, collected her baggage, and steered her to the waiting car. A chauffeur stood by the door, with the company's letters on his cap. Certainly, it was an advantage to be employed by this firm: they had an office in every city of Europe, and each branch was prepared to assist the other with the greatest freemasonry and good will. On the way to the Gare de Lyon, the American had talked all the time without cessation, and Anne had listened to him with deep attention, almost with reverence, as though an oracle were speaking. She herself was far too shy to chatter. The American told her that his name was Coleman, William L. Coleman, and he had just finished at Harvard and had come over to have a look at Europe. This sounded such a large scheme she was deeply impressed. He further told her that he was a clerk (which

he pronounced *clerk*) in the Paris office for the time being; he said this airily, as though he had deliberately chosen the role of clerk rather than that of director, or indeed general manager of the company. He was a very handsome young man, with candid eyes, a prominent jaw, smooth face, sleekly oiled hair, and good clothes. He had such a confident bearing that Anne was ready to believe anything he told her. He was not at all like the clerks of her previous experience, usually shabby and faintly apologetic about themselves. At the Gare de Lyon, Mr. William L. Coleman steered her to the train de luxe, asked for her tickets and flicked through them until he found her train reservation, parleyed at great length in slow and rather nasal French with the attendant, and finally installed her in her compartment, her luggage beside her, and everything in order. Then he had made a pretty speech, swept his hat off, bowed ceremoniously, and jauntily disappeared.

Her compartment on the train de luxe seemed to her the height of luxury. It was like a little room, with a folding toilet table, numerous chromium-plated fittings, and an abundance of towels and hot water. She very much enjoyed its solitude: she could count her money in peace, separate the different coinages, examine her book of tickets (for the fiftieth time), and review her possessions. She also thought she would be able to sleep very comfortably on the long low seat. But as the train rocked southward through the night, further marvels followed. An attendant in livery, with his arms full of bedding, opened the door and begged permission to serve her. In the twinkling of an eye, with a tug here and a push there, he had transformed the seat into a real bed, which he proceeded to

furnish with sheets, pillowcases, and blankets. The moment he had gone, she fastened her door, undressed, and dived into this bed, falling asleep immediately with the profound insouciance of eighteen years.

Once or twice during the night, she could not remember how often it happened because the intrusion was mixed up with her dreams, her door had been opened noisily and several men had talked to her about *douane*. She rubbed her eyes, but before she could wake up properly to answer them, they had chalked something on her luggage and disappeared with smiling apologies.

By the time she was fully awake next morning, she found she was in Switzerland. She knew it by the German-sounding name of the station where they had stopped, by the quantity of Toblerone chocolate on sale everywhere, and the typical scenery: precipitous mountains feathered with pine trees to the point where they touched the snow line; mysterious lakes; yoked oxen with long horns stepping slowly down the hillside paths. Passengers from the train de luxe, in slippers, dressing jackets, and all stages of semi-attire, were running along the platform, talking and laughing gaily and buying chocolate and fruit.

The rest of the day had been wonderful. She spent the greater part of it with her nose glued to her window, hungrily gazing at the landscape. She thought the train meals very original and tried everything including the bunches of sourish grapes, the red wine, and the macaroni.

Things had been equally easy at the Milan station. Before she had time to notice its size and its confusion, a smooth-faced American had again stepped forward and greeted her confidently by name. He looked like Mr. Coleman's twin, but in fact he told her almost at once that his name

was Bruntz, Eric P. Bruntz. He collected her baggage with easy efficiency and led her to an open carriage. Anne liked this immensely. It was much jollier than a taxi. The driver had his coat collar pulled up and his hat pulled down, and the face between was grubby and unshaven. Mr. Bruntz chatted with easy nonchalance. His accent was very nasal, and he slurred and stressed his words in a way she found difficult to follow. Sometimes she assented or dissented without having had the least idea of what Mr. Bruntz had said.

He told her not to come to the office that afternoon. It was by this time nearly four o'clock and they stopped work there at five-thirty, so Mr. Bamfield had said not to come, it wasn't worth while, but to rest instead. Then he directed her how to reach the office in the morning; the journey meant taking two trams, and Mr. Bruntz repeated his instructions twice, very gently, as though he were talking to a child. The carriage bowled along in the sunshine, the horses' hooves clopping merrily. Mr. Bruntz went on to tell Anne that he finished at Harvard just before he came over.

“Are you having a look at Yew-rope?” she asked promptly, striving to adapt herself to this new society. Mr. Bruntz found nothing strange in the query.

“I've had my look at it,” he conceded. “Have to go back to the New York office next week. I've completed two years here, and it's been vurry, vurry good. I'm sorry to go.”

At this point a wonder in white stone came into view and Anne leaned forward with a gasp; for a moment she could not believe that the architectural phantasy before her eyes was really stone; it looked more like lacework, and not even her fairy castles had ever had such a fantastic

outline. There was a golden statue of our Lady surmounting the whole edifice, and around it thousands of slender white spires glittered in the sunshine. She stared fixedly, and then glanced at her companion for some account of the marvel. "That's the Cathedral," Mr. Bruntz said carelessly. He frowned at it, as though it had somehow got in his way. Then he said he hoped the bells would not wake her too early in the morning, and he related how when he first came to Milan, it was late at night and he was *vurry, vurry* tired and badly in need of a good sleep. And next morning before dawn, what sounded like fifty bells from that cathedral had started crashing and banging, and they had kept up the racket until midday, when he had got up in despair.

They reached the hotel. It was not at all an impressive building, being narrow and high. A porter ran to meet them and Mr. Bruntz handed out Anne's luggage.

"You'll be all right?" he queried, sweeping off his hat with a gesture identical with Mr. Coleman's. Anne thanked him. He sprang back into the carriage, and the porter led her to her room. So here she was; this was the bad world, the fearful world, about whose dangers Aunt Hannah had always so darkly hinted.

But the moment she found herself alone in her room, her spirits swiftly drooped, sinking like a plummet in the sea. The inevitable reaction set in after the excitement of the past two days. What was the use of being so exalted and triumphant when she had no one with whom to share her impressions? That was the worst of it, to be so terribly alone. If she could only tell someone about her ideas and discoveries. But she was alone, absolutely alone, in this big hotel full of strangers speaking a foreign language, of

which she was ignorant — an hotel standing in a busy street, also crowded with jostling strangers, talking incomprehensibly. And she, Anne Farrelly, had not even the importance of a fly among them all. If she disappeared now into thin air, it would not cause consternation anywhere. She mattered just that much in the scheme of things.

She sat dejectedly on her chair, the noise of the street reverberating in her ears, and the room seemed to rock around her. Loneliness flooded in on her and engulfed her like a grey sea. She was too utterly, too extremely lonely even to cry. A scene that had just flashed by her as she walked through the station with Mr. Bruntz rose tantalisingly now on the screen of her memory. A big man had pushed past her, walking so swiftly that he outdistanced the other hurrying passengers. Anne saw only his back. But a little boy of six or seven had come scrambling against the crowd, diving in and out among the people, to charge against the big man and clasp him round the knees, crying *Papa, Papa, Papa*. She had caught a glimpse of a little upturned face, sallow and Jewish-looking, but transfigured with delight. Simultaneously, a woman rushed from the side to fling herself upon the man and lock her arms around his neck. The group obstructed the other passengers, who smiled as they skirted them. They were very ordinary people, very Italian and demonstrative in public, but there was an admirable bond welding them together. Anne wondered what they were doing now and imagined the happy reunion they were having together. She longed with all her heart for a friend. If only someone had met her, too, at the station with a face shining with joy because she had come!

She found it difficult to muster the energy to unpack. During her last week in Mallingford, Aunt Hannah had sent her a sum practically equivalent to her college fees, which had enabled her to acquire some new clothes. But they seemed now to have lost the power to please her.

She was very weary and hungry. The hotel frightened her. She was too subdued by its strangeness to seek for a meal. After an interval, however, she made a resolute effort to rouse herself from her stupor of loneliness. She unpacked her writing materials, and then wrote to her aunt, being careful, as her sort usually are, to put the best face on things:

Hotel Pellico,
Milan

My dear Aunt,

I hardly know how to thank you for your very generous gift of £25, already acknowledged with brevity, as I had to leave Mallingford on the very day I received it. I had to spend a couple of days in London on my way out here: and they were such crowded days that I had no opportunity to write again after I had sent you that letter card. I had myself to arrange all the details of my journey here and make some necessary purchases. As it was only my second visit to London, I was rather slow and bewildered there.

Although the Company were very generous and gave me a sum that adequately covered my first-class travel and incidental expenses from London to Milan, still your gift was most timely. It enabled me to give Mrs. Tubb a little present which I felt she richly deserved, and I bought a new trunk and some new clothes. I spent a total of ten pounds, and I am keeping the rest for possible future need, as I won't get my first salary cheque until the 20th of next month.

I was very sorry I could not get home to Pallasgrange before coming out here, but at the first interview in Lon-

don, Mr. Morton insisted on the urgency of my coming out at once, and I really believe I would not have got the job if I had not been willing to do so.

Your letter troubled me. It sounded as if you were fretting because I did not go on with the teaching. But this is better than anything I would have got out of teaching, even if I were trained. Here I begin with £250 a year, with an increase promised as soon as I master Italian.

It really was hard in Mallingford. I didn't want to worry you about it in letters, but it really was hard. However, the experience was valuable because I learned from it that teaching is not my vocation. It would be most uncongenial in no matter what circumstances. Then, if I were to be trained for any other profession, I would have had to do a university course, and I could not bear to ask you to find the money for that, knowing the heavy sacrifices you have made for us already. It seemed to me that I took the only way that was open to me.

I will write again in a few days. *Please* don't worry about me. I am very well and full of confidence. The journey out was most interesting. With love and many thanks again.

Ever your grateful niece,
Anne.

Mr. Bamfield, the Managing Director of the Milan branch of the International Electrical Equipment Company, Inc., was a greater surprise to Anne than either Mr. Coleman or Mr. Bruntz. None of the three bore any resemblance whatever to the typical American of her experience.

Up to this point in her life, she had never greatly admired Americans. She had seen a good number of them every summer in Pallasgrange during the tourist season. They wore extraordinary clothes: sometimes the women's

hats were as shapeless as Aunt Hannah's, and their foot-wear was strange and ungainly; the men wore stripes and checks. They all talked in very loud voices with a nasal twang. They were always asking questions. They disparaged Pallasgrange and its inhabitants, comparing all things in it with their counterpart in America to the great detriment of Pallasgrange. They were always trying to exact free hospitality and free service. They were reputed to be miserly. The shopkeepers gave them a cold welcome because the Americans were obsessed with the notion they were being cheated in Ireland, and they haggled over pence.

Henry L. Bamfield bore no resemblance to the lesser tourist tribe of his countrymen. He spoke excellent English, with a slight stammer, but without a nasal accent; an occasional raciness of phrasing only, or a pleasing colourfulness, denoted his American birth. He looked much less like a successful businessman than either Mr. Coleman or Mr. Bruntz. He had not the same smooth and prominent jaw; he did not exhibit the same careful grooming. He looked more like what an author or a poet is supposed to look like. Very tall, thin, and loosely knit, he had ingenuous grey eyes and a big mouth; he wore glasses that hooked behind his ears, but fitted badly; they were always slipping down over his nose, where he was mostly content to leave them, surveying the world rather pathetically over their rims. He had long, untidy fair hair, brushed straight back, or supposed to be so arranged, but a large lock was continually falling down over one eye. A characteristic gesture of his was to shove back his glasses and his hair in one impatient motion.

Anne arrived early at the office on her first morning,

and was surprised to find him working in a long room occupied by seven or eight other clerks, who were all Italians. She had thought that managing directors always worked in some palatial and carpeted exclusion. It was several months later before she realised that Bamfield had chosen that place for the purpose of supervision and discipline. The clerks sat in pairs at opposite sides of broad writing desks. Bamfield gave her the briefest greeting, disconcertingly indifferent.

He pulled up a chair for her beside his own, handed her a notebook and pencil, and began to dictate. The pace was fearfully rapid. It was as rapid as her examination for the diploma, a test which had lasted only a few minutes and which she had just about survived. As her fingers flew, she wondered desperately if he were going to keep it up for hours. Her colour deepened and she held her breath in the effort to follow. The words seemed to stream past her. She bit her lip. She would die rather than ask him to slow down. Then came the blessed relief of a pause. The pace, after all, had lasted only for three or four pages of her notebook. Bamfield's method was to study each letter in silence for a few moments and then shoot off the replies. She began to breathe more easily. The thing was simple, after all. According as Bamfield dictated the replies, he pushed the letters toward her so that she could copy the addresses from them.

In one of the pauses, Anne stole a glance around her. The room was nondescript, absolutely bare of decoration, distempered in green and very well lighted, the upper part of the walls being mainly glass. On the opposite side of the broad table at which Bamfield sat, an Italian had his place. He was romantically handsome, with jet-black

hair, an olive skin, flashing teeth, and lustrous brown eyes. The first time Anne looked about her, she found this man's burning gaze fixed on her. She dropped her own in some confusion. Surely, she thought, he is very unmannerly to stare like that. But at the moment she had no time to think any more about him. Bamfield's voice raced on remorselessly and she busily flicked the pages of her notebook in pursuit. The next time she got a chance to look up, the brown eyes were still turned on her boldly, this time with a hint of laughter in their depths. It seemed to the girl an unprecedented situation. She glanced at the director, but he was intent on his letters and appeared not to notice anything. She frowned at her notebook. Was the fellow deliberately annoying her? And surely he was very daring to behave like that under the director's very nose? Moreover he seemed to have nothing whatever to do except stare at her mockingly. She wondered if this sort of thing was part of the day in an Italian office.

“Do you know French?” asked Bamfield abruptly.

She nodded.

“I mean can you take shorthand notes in French?”

She nodded again. She had never done so, but she was quite willing to try.

Bamfield dictated in French with great grammatical accuracy, but with a false accent. She listened critically. He spoke now with such careful slowness, it would be simple to keep up with him in longhand. There were only three letters in French.

“Any Italian?” he asked, shifting his papers. She shook her head regretfully. “Learn it quickly,” he said, “because you'd treble your usefulness here if you knew it, and then

you could deal with all my correspondence." He spoke a few words in Italian into the telephone at his elbow and then sat waiting in silence. Meanwhile, the man's eyes at the other side of the table never left her face. A small elderly woman, dressed in black, with a little meek, colourless countenance, hastened into the room. Bamfield spoke to her. She made a gesture to Anne, who stood up and followed her.

It was a very well conducted office, according to Italian standards. The women employees worked together in one room isolated at the end of a corridor. There were only two of them in addition to Anne. She thought at first that they were sisters, or even twins, they were so alike, and was surprised to find that they were no relation to one another. They were both widows: hence (they later explained to Anne with a reproachful sort of look) the reason they had to work for their living. Their names were Piazza and Chiesa. They both dressed in black, with high necks to their dresses and gold chains dangling. They were neat and saddish little persons, with prim faces, sallow skin, and hair drawn trimly back into tight buns. Anne's desk and typewriter stood between theirs. "I'm well chaperoned, anyhow," she thought, with a flash of amusement.

But she was weeks in the office before she chatted with this pair. Neither of them knew a word of English, and at first she knew no Italian, a condition of affairs imposing silence. Moreover, she had at first to give her whole attention to her work, and it hardly left room for another thought. She found it sufficiently difficult to test her ability and she strove with all her might to master it.

When she had finished her letters on that first after-

noon, she took them to the room in which Bamfield had been sitting that morning. She entered timidly. He was not there, and his table that had then been piled high with a mass of letters, documents, and portfolios, was completely bare. She put her letters down, then noticed that his blotter was gone and even his chair. She hesitated and retrieved her bundle uncertainly. Meanwhile eight pairs of eyes were fixed on her, and the brown eyes on the opposite side of the table were snapping with excitement. Their owner sprang up and poured out voluble explanations in Italian. She understood no word of it, and her perplexity was written on her face. The other seven sprang up too, ran forward and clustered around, all of them talking eagerly together. Anne looked with embarrassment at the ring of laughing faces that now encompassed her. "Mr. Bamfield?" she said helplessly. Her cheeks were burning. One of the clerks essayed English to the boisterous and encouraging amusement of his colleagues.

"Up dey, dey, Mees, up dey, dey," he said pointing vigorously to the ceiling. "He solo now, he vairry 'appy." Roars of amusement from his fellows. "But we no 'appy. We vairry sad." The speaker drew his mouth down in an eloquent grimace. "Naice mees come 'ere wit' us no more."

Anne got an inkling of the situation and moved toward the door. The eight struggled together who should open it for her, scuffling and pushing. Finally the door was opened, and they stood aside and bowed deep with mock ceremoniousness as she escaped.

She tracked down Bamfield at last. He sat now alone in a large room upstairs, and indicated a corner table to Anne. "Wait," he said tersely, as she handed him the letters. He was frowning and seemed to be in bad humour

She waited with a certain confidence, knowing she had made no mistakes. Bamfield read every letter slowly with extreme care before he signed it. At the end of his scrutiny, his face was somewhat clearer. He leaned back in his chair rather wearily and considered her.

"Where are you staying?"

She named her hotel in some surprise. The London office had made the arrangement and she thought her movements sufficiently important to be well known to Bamfield.

"Do you like it there?" he pursued.

"No."

"Why?"

She hesitated. She felt that it would not enhance her merit in his eyes if she confessed that the place scared her. After a pause, during which he looked at her coldly over his glasses, she said:

"I'm sure it will be much too dear to stay there always."

"We'll have to see . . ." said Bamfield slowly. He reflected for a moment and then said decisively:

"When you come in every morning, you're to go to your desk in that room with the two Signore, and come up here for dictation as soon as I ring for you. I'm having all my files shifted up here, too, tomorrow. You ought to come up here and go through them in your spare time, just to see if you can catch on to what we're doing."

That night at dinner Bamfield complained irritably to his wife:

"I don't know what Morton was thinking of, to send out such a kid. . . . When I saw her — when I saw her, I

said to myself, 'What the hell are we going to do with her here?'

Mrs. Bamfield was affectionately amused. "How old is she?" she queried.

"Oh, I don't know. I didn't ask her. She looks about sixteen, but I suppose she must be more than that. But that's not it. It's — it's that she's so pink and gold, like a doll."

Mrs. Bamfield laughed again.

"Oh, dash it all, Noggs," he went on, "it was too bad of them. I don't know when I've been so busy, with Bruntz having to go back next week and everything, and where I had to keep everyone waiting and half the day's business undone, while I shifted round the whole office staff and half the furniture of the building, just so as to stow her away in a safe place where she wouldn't be annoyed. . . ."

"Can she do the work?" asked his wife.

"Yes, that's the worst of it. I was really dying for her to have made a proper bungle of the whole thing, just so that I could make a savage report and send her back at once. But I unloaded a fortnight's accumulation on to her in three hours, and she did it all right."

"Oh, I'm glad," said his wife, much relieved. "You won't have such a hard time now."

But Bamfield was still greatly bothered.

"It's the Signora Piazza-Chiesa type we want here, you know," he said. "This isn't America. . . . Awful nuisance having such a kid about the place."

To say that Anne did not like life in the hotel was an understatement. She detested it. The food was good, but

that was the only factor she could appreciate. The hotel was not the sort of milieu which a girl of her age, circumstances, and inexperience could inhabit with any comfort. She read that clearly in the eyes of the management, staff, porters, and waiters. Even while they bowed low to her with exceeding deference, their eyes were wondering and almost accusing. Mr. Morton had said that she was to take her time and look around her. The company was prepared to pay her expenses at this hotel until such a date as she found suitable accommodation in the city. Their advice had been to go slowly and not move from it until she was fully satisfied. But before Anne had spent two days in the hotel, she was chafing to get away from it.

Lunch there was a hurried affair in a crowded dining room. She did not remove her outdoor clothes for this meal, and she usually sat there fretted by the delay and the marked inattention of the waiters. She did not realise how plainly, from the moment of her arrival, her luggage and her clothes had proclaimed her to be poor. And poverty, in the eyes of an hotel staff, is the capital crime.

Dinner was the worst ordeal. It was served to the hotel residents in an inner hall to which the public were not admitted, unless they were guests of residents. Anne was awed by this dining hall, with its thick carpet, palms, softly shaded lights, and heavily scented flowers. But her clothes were almost offensively wrong for such a place. The blue linen dress and its kind, suitable for strap hanging in the trams and for office work, were not suitable for evening wear in such an hotel. She dined at a little table by herself and she always tried to be early, so that she could slip to her place unobserved. Dinner was an elabo-

rate meal, with a great number of small courses, and an intimidating array of cutlery and glass. An elderly, portly waiter sponsored her table; he had a paunch, and he breathed heavily when he walked. He stood close to her shoulder as she dealt with each course. He was resigned to Anne, holding that the unlikelihood of a substantial tip was offset by the fact that she spared him unnecessary journeys, was easily pleased, and never lingered at table.

But always as the room filled up, the other diners noticed Anne and began to whisper and nod among themselves. The women wore full evening dress, gowns cut low with no backs to them and a glittering array of jewels; their faces were heavily made up, with the merest threads of eyebrows, eyes blue shadowed, and scarlet gashes of mouths. Some of them adopted the most startling facial colour schemes, their skin looking as if it were enamelled in orange or bronze. The men, too, wore evening dress, showing a broad expanse of shirt front, relieved by the gleam of gold or the flash of diamonds. Anne's eyes flurried over them. Often she hardly dared look up at all. The diners on their part leaned back luxuriantly in their chairs and raked her with bold eyes and impudent smiles. Her waiter, by contrast, frowned at her severely, and breathed heavily in her ear, as he unnecessarily polished the plates he set before her. At the conclusion of her uncomfortable meal, she had to walk out under a battery of stares that swept her from head to foot.

She only once penetrated the lounge, on a Sunday afternoon when the loneliness of her bedroom forced her to leave it. Open French windows led from the lounge to a beflowered balcony. All the armchairs in the room were drawn out on to this balcony, and here the residents sat,

chatting with animation while they sipped a variety of beverages. A silence fell on them when Anne opened the door, and the usual curious stares were turned on her. She fled back to her room.

Her evening occupation was to go to bed with one of the daily papers and an English-Italian dictionary, with the help of which she worked through the advertisements, hoping to find some announcement of a place where she could suitably stay. On about the fifth evening of this search, she found the address of a convent which stated they had a vacancy for another lady boarder. She thought such a place promised safe harbourage. She knew the road in which it was situated, for she happened to have noticed it from the tram. She determined to call there the following evening and make enquiries.

A beautifully wrought iron gate gave access to the convent. When she rang, a lay sister, dressed in white, came hurrying across the paved courtyard to admit her. Anne explained her business in slow and careful French, of which the nun appeared not to understand a single word. She was a clumsy little old woman with the manner of a peasant, perfectly resigned not to understand, and anxious to deliver over the visitor to some higher authority. Anne obeyed her gestures and followed her across the paved courtyard, through a glass-panelled door, up a flight of polished stone steps and into a little *salon*, where the lay sister left her to wait. She looked around and sighed with relief at its familiarity: a stained and polished floor, two chairs, a table on which some religious periodicals had been placed, a *prie-dieu* in the corner under a crucifix.

Presently the door opened and admitted a nun. She, too, was dressed in white, but she wore a blue veil and a blue

cincture. She was the most beautiful woman Anne had ever seen in her life, with glorious dark-blue eyes, perfect features, and a transparent olive skin. She was tall, slim, and perfectly graceful in all her movements; she could have worn nothing more becoming than that habit of white and blue. But her expression was extraordinarily cold and disdainful. Her hands were clasped under her sleeves and she bowed aloofly to Anne, who again explained her business in French. The nun sat on the edge of a chair, motioned Anne to sit down, and considered her unsmilingly. She asked her some questions in such rapid French that Anne had difficulty in following, and whenever the nun had to repeat herself, she drew her delicate eyebrows together in a pained frown.

Anne explained that she was a Catholic, Irish, and that she had come to Milan to work in an American office; also that she was at present staying in the Hotel Pellico, which she did not find suitable. “No, of course,” agreed the Reverend Mother coldly, “it is not suitable.” She then mentioned the terms at the convent. It seemed to Anne very dear, but she was most anxious to escape from the hotel, and decided that the convent would do for the time being. It was agreed that she should transfer there the following afternoon. Throughout the interview, Reverend Mother never relaxed from her haughty aloofness into even the semblance of graciousness. Nevertheless, Anne left the convent in a mood of profound relief and thankfulness. She would be happier now, she thought. She packed her modest possessions that night after dinner, and informed the hotel manager she was leaving on the morrow.

The following afternoon, her mercurial spirits soared when she saw the room allotted to her at the convent. It

had faded pink wall paper, lovely old carved mahogany furniture, a red terrazzo floor highly polished, and interesting religious prints on the walls. The French window opened on to a balcony that looked down on a large walled garden, mostly given up to grass, except for a few pear trees trained up against the brick walls and a single magnolia tree standing on the lawn near the house. The September evenings were still warm enough to sit outdoors. She pulled her armchair out on the balcony and sat there gratefully drinking in the cool refreshment of the air and the silence, so alluring to the senses after the crowded street she had left.

Presently the little old lay sister who had shown her her rooms, knocked at the door, put her head in and beckoned. Anne was guided down a corridor to where a dining table was set out on a landing at the top of a noble marble staircase, evidently the main staircase of the building. The landing was tiled in black and white, and was quite large enough to serve as dining room. There were three other girls already at the table, and they rose ceremoniously when Anne came forward. But the lay sister made no attempt at introductions, or even a pleasantry. She placed four plates of soup on the table and hurried away. The girls sat down and a silence fell.

Anne tasted her soup and then glanced shyly at the others. The girl at the head of the table could be only about sixteen: she was a tiny dainty little person with Titian-red hair and queer hazel eyes veiled with thick black lashes. She was strikingly beautiful, though her nose was rather long and hooked. She wore a white pleated skirt and a scarlet blouse. But the look on her face was so proud, cold, and hard, that Anne's heart sank in bewilder-

ment. Why should anyone so young and lovely have such an expression of countenance? The girl on her right was older, probably twenty, and unmistakably a Jewess: she was good looking in a heavy sensual fashion, with coarse black hair elaborately waved. Her blue silk frock was richly embroidered in bright colours at the neck, cuffs, and waist. The third girl at the table was older than the others; she looked about thirty. She was plainly dressed in black silk and faintly reminded Anne of Signora Piazza, having the same sallow skin, nondescript appearance, and meek expression.

Anne sipped her soup, feeling uncomfortable. The girls were staring at her with a faint kind of friendliness tinged with curiosity. She thought that someone should really have made an introduction. With her few words of Italian, she hesitated to make an opening.

After what seemed an eternal silence, the Titian-haired girl spoke very slowly, with careful enunciation:

“What — is — your — name?”

“Oh, you speak English?” Anne cried eagerly. She was delighted. Here was someone to talk to at last after her many silent evenings.

“Oh, no,” Titian hair spread out her hands in a gesture of self-disparagement. “I, vairry bad, it ees such a long time that I do not speak....” She got this out with painful slowness, as though searching her memory for every word. The other two girls were looking at her with rapt admiration. It was evident that they themselves knew no English.

“What is your name?” persisted the other.

“Anne Farrelly.”

“Oh, we have already an Annetta,” she waved toward the Jewish girl, and added the rest of her name, which

sounded to Anne like some barbarous and unspellable combination of syllables. "She 'ungarian. She study music at Conservatorio here. My name Allegra. I am the Countess Allegra Verzocchi de' Santi. This is my friend (indicating the nondescript girl on her left), Signorina Maria Arrigo. She go with me when I go lessons. I finish school here."

Anne grasped that the Signorina Maria was a chaperone to the Countess Allegra, which explained her apologetic air. The three girls were now resting their chins on their clasped hands, examining Anne with vast curiosity. They seemed not even to see the plates which the bustling little lay sister pushed in front of them. The older girls were absorbed in the performance of the Countess Allegra.

"What is your family motto?" pursued Allegra.

Anne choked slightly over her macaroni and did not answer at once.

The little countess thought that her English was at fault. "I mean your device, you know," she explained, "what is written under your coat of arms. Ours is" with a sudden proud upward tilt of her chin, she pattered in Latin something quite unintelligible to Anne, and then went on to describe with relish and in great detail her family coat of arms. Her English was improving as she talked. "Now tell me all about yours," she concluded.

"We have none," said Anne.

Allegra stared with a stricken look. She murmured rapidly to the others in Italian, and they too looked suddenly despondent and reproachful: Anne saw that her stock had gone down.

"Aren't you noble, then?" Allegra asked faintly.

Pride of race stirred in the stranger. "Oh, noble, yes," she insisted. "Everyone in Ireland is noble. I'm afraid you

know nothing about us and it would take me a long time to explain."

Allegra looked puzzled. She translated the gist of this to the others, who digested it with wonder. The cross examination continued:

"What are you studying here?"

"I'm not a student," said Anne.

"Then why have you come to this convent?"

"I'm working."

"*Working!* What does that mean?"

"I've got a job here. I'm earning my living."

"My God!" said Allegra. "This is simply terrible." She murmured in agitation to the others and their eyebrows went up like hers.

The meal had come to an end. Anne rose and smiled a *buona sera* at the trio.

Her room was dusky and rather cold. She decided she would continue her usual evening study of Italian from the vantage point of bed. Undressing quickly, she put her room in order for the night. There was no electric-light switch by the door, but two little pear-shaped wooden bulbs hung by cords over the pillow of her bed. Such fittings were unfamiliar, but she surmised one of the bulbs regulated the electric light. She sat on her pillow and pressed the white button. Nothing happened. She continued to press, wondering for what purpose it was intended. Then she tried the other bulb, and the room was flooded with light. She picked up the first bulb again and fiddled with it abstractedly.

Rapid and heavy footsteps sounded in the corridor. The little lay sister flung open the door. "Cosa c'e? Cosa c'e?" she gasped. Anne stared. "Niente," she said placidly,

the bulb still in her hand. Wrathfully the nun snatched it from her. She was flushed with haste and very, very angry. She scolded volubly. By means of gesture and pantomime, as though violently ringing a hand bell, she conveyed that the bulb was a bell. Anne grasped that she had been ringing the bell, ringing, ringing, ringing, ringing; that she had roused the whole convent and startled the community out of their wits at this time of night; that the poor elderly sister had been sent hurrying around and round the building and up a staircase a mile long, with her heart in her mouth, believing that a dreadful fire had broken out, or that the Signorina was being murdered. The nun hung the switch back against the wall, shook her finger severely at Anne and stamped out, still muttering angrily.

She was gone only a few minutes when there was a gentle knocking at the door.

“Cosa c'e?” from Anne.

“It is I, the Countess Allegra. May I come in?”

“What is it?” asked Anne inhospitably.

“I would like to have a little talk.”

Anne could not bear it. No, she had really had quite enough of Allegra for one evening.

“I am so sorry,” she said with finality. “But I cannot let you in. I am already in bed and very sleepy.”

“Thank you,” Allegra breathed softly through the door.

Anne never quite plumbed the mysteries of the convent. She never found out what the Order was, nor exactly what the nuns did. The boarders occupied a separate wing of the building, and were debarred from the rest of it. They saw absolutely nothing of the community. The same little lay sister served their meals and attended to their rooms.

Anne asked to be directed to the Chapel as soon as she arrived, but was told there was none. She gathered that the nuns were poor, and that they disliked taking boarders, but were forced to do so on account of their financial straits.

On her first Sunday in the convent, the lay sister came to Anne's room in the morning and informed her that the Reverend Mother would accompany her to Mass at such and such an hour. Anne was surprised. She had intended to saunter to the Cathedral and spend most of the morning there, listening to the boys' choir. She made a careful toilet in honour of the Reverend Mother, feeling glad of a chance to improve acquaintance. As she dressed, she frowned discontentedly at her clothes: the light grey summer coat that had looked so well in Mallingford, had faded rapidly under the Italian sun; her straw hat had acquired a battered look, and her low-heeled shoes were clumsy. She reflected that she would have to spend all the balance of Aunt Hannah's gift on clothes. She was wrongly attired according to Milanese standards. However, she made the best of herself and then descended to find the Reverend Mother waiting for her in the hall, her hands as usual clasped in her sleeves. She bowed a greeting to Anne as they set out. The distance was short and they arrived at the church without a word having been spoken.

It was a small church, and evidently one of the most fashionable in Milan. The congregation consisted mostly of women (the Milanese men do not usually go to Mass). Costly furs, satin, and jewelry passed into the rows of chairs, the wearers exhaling a subtle fragrance. There were nurses, too, in attendance on very young children faultlessly groomed, curled, and beribboned. To Anne these

nurses were the most interesting persons in the congregation: dressed in peasant costume, with sandals and white stockings; voluminous white skirts elaborately embroidered and stiffly starched; a black velvet corsage over an embroidered blouse; and a black silk cap by way of headgear.

In silence, the Reverend Mother conducted her back again to the convent. As they walked along sedately, Anne stole a glance at the beautiful face, so haughty and aloof. She thought that probably it was against the nun's rules to converse in the street, and that when they got back to the convent, the Superior would talk to her for a little while and make the usual kind enquiries. But when they stepped into the hall, Reverend Mother bowed a frigid dismissal and disappeared down a corridor, her duty fulfilled. Anne climbed the stairs thoughtfully.

She had already resumed her evening study of newspaper advertisements of suitable places to stay.

Chapter Four

THE first two words of the Italian language acquired by Anne were the words *bella bionda*. She knew what they meant before she knew how to say, *Please*, or *Thank you*, or *Good day*. Every time she walked in the city a man swooped behind her and set himself to follow her closely, muttering unintelligibly and earnestly close to her ear: in that stream of talk, two words were always recurring, *bella bionda*. The first time it happened, she swung round and looked at the man: small, dirty looking, unshaved and shabby, he was not one whit abashed to be thus confronted. She told him vigorously to go away about his business. He looked at her with sly eyes and made no answer. It was apparent that he had no business. He had nothing in the world to do except to pester her. He did not go away. He followed her more persistently than ever, until at last he wore down her endurance and she jumped on the tram that took her home.

One afternoon, the exasperation from this kind of annoyance became intense. She had several purchases to make, and her still deficient knowledge of the language made it imperative that she should study the shop windows and consider carefully before engaging with the assistants. She had not left the tram five minutes when the usual black shadow fluttered behind her, and the usual assurance was murmured in her ear, *bella bionda, bella bionda*. She

ground her teeth with irritation. She endured it as long as she could. Then she said to herself: "It's preposterous; I'm not going to stand it; this fellow will drive me home again, and for the third Saturday afternoon in succession, I shall have to leave my shopping undone." She prepared a little speech in her mind, went over it several times in her head until she had the Italian phrasing perfect, and then crossed the street to a decorative looking policeman, who seemed to be engaged in a mild kind of point duty. Meanwhile the black shadow waited on the kerb, watching her movements with the greatest interest.

The policeman listened with close attention to all that she had to say. He understood her perfectly. She did not have to repeat herself. But he looked melancholy rather than indignant. He stroked his chin reflectively and swung his tasselled baton while he pondered. Finally he delivered judgment: "But Signorina, why are you here?" Anne stared at him. "I have to do some shopping," she protested. "But you shouldn't, you know, you really shouldn't," he said, shaking his head reprovingly at her. "Ladies don't go out alone, you know." Anne was furious. She walked away, and immediately the black shadow detached itself again from the passing crowds and kept step with her, resuming the inevitable assurance of *bella bionda*. Quite defeated again, she abandoned her shopping plans and leaped on a tram. She went home and digested the policeman's words. According to Italian standards, common standards and not even strict ones, a lady did not go out unaccompanied. She simply did not "let herself in" for any annoyance.

Before she had completed a week's residence at the convent, Anne got weary of trams. She seemed to spend far too large a proportion of her day in them. Though now

somewhat nearer to her work than she had been in the hotel, she still had to take two trams to reach the office. Owing to the Italian's faith in a siesta after dinner, two hours' leave were allowed for the midday interval, and this enabled Anne to get back to the convent for lunch. She procured a street map of the city and worked out a short cut from the convent to the office. This route lay along unfrequented bystreets and across a waste patch of ground, through which ran a railway track crossed by a footbridge. It was a long walk, but Anne resolved to go that way at least once every day to vary the monotony of the trams. On the first day, she was pleased with the change as she approached the open patch of waste ground: the air was fresher than in the streets and she was glad of an opportunity to take exercise. As she approached the iron footbridge over the railway, she saw a little platoon of soldiers swinging along from the opposite side. She hastened her steps, believing that she would be across the bridge before they reached it, but she either miscalculated or they deliberately increased their pace. She got to the top just as they began to spring up the steps on the other side. It was too late to retreat. She shrank back to let them pass. They hailed her jocularly, shouting and laughing, and when they reached her, thrust their faces into hers as they passed, disgusting her with their garlic-scented breath. It was *bella bionda* now and a good deal more. Every one of them made some pleasantries as he hurried by, and the serjeant marching behind made no effort to restrain them, but grinned delightedly. They shouted their witticisms in the Milanese dialect, of which Anne understood no word, but she knew she would not have liked it if she had understood. She clutched the handrail of the bridge until

they had passed, her face burning. They just stopped short of chucking her under the chin.

Next day, she took the same walk again. As she left the shelter of the streets and began to cross the common toward the bridge, she descried in the distance the same little grey-blue platoon swinging along. She was bound to encounter them at the bridge. With rage in her heart, she turned back into the streets and walked until she picked up her tram. Clearly there was a barracks somewhere in the vicinity and the common was a sort of soldiers' reserve. She consulted Signora Piazza in the office and the melancholy little widow gave her to understand that the district in question was rough, not fit for ladies to frequent. Anne also confided in the Signora about the "follower's" plague from which she suffered, the pests of the *bella bionda* school. The advice she received was to ignore them completely. There was no redress to be had. To pretend one heard or to become troubled only encouraged them and made matters worse. The Signora looked pained while she was giving this counsel. Evidently that of which Anne complained was a feature of Italian city life, considered inevitable and irremediable, which it was the part of good manners to ignore. She followed the Signora Piazza's advice.

But shortly afterwards she was choosing a length of black silk in a shop, with the idea of sending home a little gift to Aunt Hannah, and she became engaged in an animated conversation with the assistant on the subject of Milanese silks. A man came up to the counter as though he were going to buy, stooped with interest over the roll of silk she was examining, and told her that she had the most beautiful neck he had ever seen in his life. He also added

the inevitable assurance that she was a *bella bionda*. Anne got a sensation of nausea. Despite the Signora Piazza's counsel, she could not refrain from giving the man a wrathful look. He was gazing at the bale of silk with an air of profound interest, and he was clearly of the "follower's" ilk: shabby, greasy, furtive, unshaved. Where, thought Anne despairingly, do they spring from? What do they do all day? How do they live? What satisfaction do they derive from this idiotic pursuit?

She assumed a stony expression as though she were blind and deaf and dumb. The man elaborated his comments. The assistant's face was perfectly blank as though she had seen and heard nothing. Anne paid for her purchase and left the shop. The black shadow followed her, still muttering. She gritted her teeth and told herself that this time she would not be put off her business. The black shadow followed her round many corners, up and down streets, and waited for her outside other shops. She bore it as jauntily as she could. This fellow was unusually persistent, not to be shaken off by any frigidity. The annoyance had the invariable effect of making her curtail her afternoon's programme. She sprang on a tram much sooner than she had intended. The shadow came too. Her heart quickened. He was going to track her home. This was unusual. Normally one shook them off on the tram step. When she alighted at her road, he still followed, renewing his crazy muttering, this time with a more insistent note. As she turned the corner, Anne perceived that the convent gate stood unexpectedly open. She would not have the delay of ringing. She strolled along with an air of unconcern, glimpsing an irresistible opportunity. Waiting until she was five paces from the gate, she quietly gathered her

parcels on her left arm, then swung suddenly round to confront her persecutor and slapped his face with all her might, the smack resounding in the silent road. Taken completely by surprise, he reeled back at the impact. She sprang through the gate, clanged it noisily behind her, slipped the bolt, raced gleefully across the courtyard, and vanished into the building. Her heart was thumping. When she reached her room, she locked the door behind her, and then sat staring at the window, wondering if he would swarm up to her balcony. But presently the silence of the house reassured her. That evening at supper, she did not relate her adventure. She did not feel that either the lay sister, or Allegra, or Maria, or Annetta would give her a sympathetic hearing.

She loved the office routine, and her enthusiasm grew with her efficiency. After a short while, Bamfield told his wife that Miss Farrelly was almost a perfect secretary: silent, observant, and reliable. Anne had soon understood that silence in the I.E.E.C. office was a condition of success. Bamfield was silent and he concentrated with a desperate sort of intensity. Chatter, or the gossiping tendency, would have been in his eyes a capital offence. His methods were at first very puzzling to her. He never made any attempt to organise her day, but left her hours and hours of idleness which she had to fill in herself as best she could. She devoted most of this spare time to reading back the files in his office and studying the blueprints accumulated there, in an effort to understand the firm's business. He habitually neglected the correspondence. He would not answer his letters until the arrears were enormous, and even when he dictated the answers he would frequently neglect to sign them for several days. At first Anne held

him in righteous condemnation for this erratic behaviour; she suspected him to be an unmethodical businessman unfit to be in charge of the place. But gradually she understood that the correspondence was the merest fringe of his work and of relatively small importance. He spent the greater part of his day in the factory. This was on the opposite side of the road from the offices, a building devoted to the manufacture of cables and primary electrical apparatus. The firm did a large business with industrial concerns up and down Italy and they employed a corps of engineers and draughtsmen constantly working on the detailed execution of contracts. In the factory, Bamfield discussed deliveries with the foreman, or argued prices on the telephone, or tested goods.

The office routine went forward every day with a sort of military smartness. Bamfield was in reality an excellent organiser and a stern disciplinarian, and though he left Anne largely to her own devices, he saw to it that no one else had any opportunity to be idle. In a short while, not only did she love the office routine, but she began to regard efficiency with a reverence almost amounting to worship. In her hierarchy of values, she ranked efficiency next to holiness. If she made a typescript error in one of her letters, she would pull out the sheet and rewrite the whole page rather than deface it with an erasure.

She read an Italian paper every evening, studied Italian at night, and practised every new word and phrase on the two Signore. It is not difficult to learn a language that is always before the eyes and sounding in the ears. Her progress was rapid. Before she was three months in Italy, she could read with ease prose such as Manzoni's *Promessi Sposi*; she knew how to make her way about the city and

to do her shopping; and she could make a good attempt at sustained conversation.

One week the pressure of business in the office was unusually severe. Several large contracts were being worked out in detail. Bamfield, forced by the usual necessity, had been leaving the correspondence unanswered on his desk. He was devoting all his attention to the details of a certain very large contract, estimated at over a thousand pounds, spending hours with the engineers who made the specification, the draughtsmen who laboured in their shirt sleeves at the blueprints, and the factory foreman who had to provide for delivery of the material. Finally, every detail was settled and he gave Anne the contract to type, telling her to make all possible haste, as two copies of it had to be posted to London that day. About an hour later, she took up the lengthy documents and put them on his desk for his signature. She could see that Bamfield was very satisfied at the completion of this contract and there was a ring of pride in his voice as he dictated the covering letter.

He then resolutely attacked the accumulation of correspondence, but he could make hardly any headway because of the telephone interruptions. Every few minutes, its shrill insistence defied them. There was a stream of callers, moreover, each more importunate than the other, whom he could not avoid interviewing. Anne would retire to her desk, wait there until summoned upstairs again, and then sit with her pencil poised in readiness, while he argued and explained and expostulated into the telephone. When she went home to lunch, only a fraction of the letters accumulated had been answered.

During the afternoon, the pace became intensified.

Bamfield no longer pushed the lock of hair out of his eyes; his glasses remained on the tip of his nose; his forehead was lightly beaded with perspiration. He looked jaded. At four o'clock, Anne who was developing a headache from the infernal insistence of his telephone, ventured to remind him that they would have to stop if she were to get off the important letters by six o'clock. He glanced at his watch and assented.

The office hours terminated at half-past five. At five o'clock Anne called Giuseppe, who was general factotum, and sent him up with the letters she had finished.

Giuseppe was her chief friend among the staff. His appearance always reminded her of the clown in *Pagliacci*: a little dark man, walking with a pronounced limp; he had a cast in one eye, and he was extraordinarily ugly, his whole face looking as though it had been pushed sideways: but he was one of the firm's most honest and trusted employees. His duties as factotum included that of janitor, and he was very proud of the fact that only he and Bamfield possessed a key to the building. It was Giuseppe who opened the place in the morning and locked up again at night. He was very earnest and conscientious about his work, showing profound reverence for all the firm's transactions, which to him were a dark mystery, a sort of sacrosanct rite, very wonderful, though incomprehensible. He took the cables to the post office during the day, and he seemed never to get accustomed to the high nature of this task. It always amused Anne to meet him limping down the stairs, a fluttering cable held gingerly between two fingers, his face full of self-importance and dignity. She suspected he was illiterate, for when she teased him, she found out that he had not the faintest idea what the

communications were about. He only knew that he, Giuseppe, was flicking messages across the Atlantic, and he looked upon his American employers as gods walking the earth.

From the first he had shown an almost doglike devotion to Anne. If she occasionally snubbed the rest of the staff, she felt she could not slight Giuseppe, so humble and sincere was his adoration. The two other women, when they typed, picked out the letters with their two first fingers and worked with a rapidity born only of long practice. There were then no “secretarial courses,” or “commercial colleges” booming in Italy, and feminine success in business had no prestige attached to it. One result of Anne’s different training was that she typed by touch, her eyes glued to the sheet from which she copied, her ten fingers flying. Giuseppe noticed this, and he was full of admiration. Not to look at the keyboard when she was writing seemed to him like wizardry. Whenever he had a little free time, he would come into the typists’ room and lean against the doorjamb to watch her at her work, muttering exclamations of wonder, his dark face wreathed in smiles. (One of Giuseppe’s peculiarities was that he never sat down.) At first Anne was embarrassed by his extravagant admiration; he would lean against the door, nodding his head at her and clucking his tongue; but later she indulged him with tolerant smiles and they became fast friends. She found that Giuseppe could help her in a thousand ways and he liked nothing better than to be allowed to serve her.

One Saturday afternoon, a little incident ratified their friendship. She had been trying to make her way back to the convent from town. The trams were very crowded and

infrequent; she was afraid she would be late for supper, so she resigned herself to the extravagance of a carriage and hailed one. As she stepped into it, she was amazed to recognize the driver.

“Why, Giuseppe,” she exclaimed, “I didn’t know you did this. You haven’t left us, surely?”

“Oh, no, no, Signorina. This is my son’s horse and carriage, and I took the animal out to exercise him, as the son has been in bed with a cold these last few days. Is it I, leave those good Americans, those great ones! No, indeed. But my son lives by this work and sometimes I help him by taking out the horse on Saturday afternoons, or in the evening to give him a rest. I like the air. My son is married now, but he was always a good son.”

When they arrived at the convent, Giuseppe seemed surprised, and asked her if she knew the nuns. Anne told him she lived there and added that she was a Catholic. He was still more surprised and delighted. He had thought that no foreigner was ever a Catholic. He concluded that being a Catholic was equivalent to being an Italian. “You have the faith, Signorina,” he said, “you are one of us.” He wanted to take no payment for the drive. When Anne insisted, he morosely accepted the exact sum registered on the meter.

Afterwards, at intervals in the office work, Anne would enquire after the horse, whose name was Garibaldi. Was he not a splendid animal, Giuseppe would ask her? Had she even seen a finer horse? (Truth to tell, she was perplexed by the spindly and wavering legs of Garibaldi.) Giuseppe would tell her about the prodigious quantity of oats this horse consumed, and its cost, going on to explain that the horse was in magnificent condition, a little thin, perhaps,

but then that was constitutional. Sometimes he complained about the English ladies who arrived at the station and told his son that Garibaldi was starved. Oh, the English Mees, they were so queer! They would count Garibaldi's ribs before they got into the carriage. They had come to Milan to see the Cathedral, and then they would not look at the Cathedral, but only at Garibaldi. He thought they were all a little mad, those English Mees. Anne knew she was making progress with the language when she understood Giuseppe's outpourings. He did not speak Italian, but Milanese, a barbarous and incongruous mixture of clipped Italian words and words with a German derivation.

On the evening of that strenuous day in question, when Giuseppe placed the bundle of signed letters in front of her he murmured that Bamfield had gone home. She smiled, knowing that this was an intimation that she too should hurry. Giuseppe discouraged any lingering behind on the part of the staff in the evening. He liked to get the building cleared by a quarter to six, so as to get off home to his Garibaldi.

Anne found herself sharing his anxiety to get away. She felt dazed and exhausted after the heavy pressure of the day, and longed for fresh air and rest.

Rapidly she began to check over the letters and enclosures, folding and sealing them. She left the London letter last, with its two important documents, copy and duplicate of the thousand-pound contract, which she glanced at again before folding. Then she noticed with sudden disturbance that the contract was not signed. Bamfield had signed the covering letter, but not the contract. Clearly she could not send the letter to the post now. Should she

put it in her drawer until morning? She hesitated with the documents in her hand, then picked up the telephone and rang up his house, only to learn that he and his wife were out, dining at some unknown *venue*.

Meanwhile, Giuseppe was waiting to take the letters to the post. The rest of the staff had gone.

“There’s a muddle here,” she told him, “about a letter, and I can’t send it off until I speak to Mr. Bamfield.”

“Then you must leave it until morning,” said Giuseppe promptly.

“No, it must go tonight. It’s fearfully urgent.”

“Then send it,” said Giuseppe, bewildered.

“I can’t send it until I speak to Mr. Bamfield. He’s not at home, and I must just wait here until I can track him down.”

“But office hours are over now,” protested Giuseppe. “You work here from half-past nine until half-past five, with an interval from one to three p.m., those are the hours.” Anne laughed.

“I know. But when a difficulty like this arises, one does not think of hours. I must wait here.”

“No,” said Giuseppe firmly. “You are very young and inexperienced. Allow an old man to advise you. What you must do with that letter is put it in the drawer and begin to think about it again tomorrow morning at half-past nine. That is how business is done.”

“You are wrong.” Anne retorted. “Mr. Bamfield would be very disappointed if I did that. I must try to get in touch with him and send the letter off. If it does not go tonight, the week end intervenes and that would mean a week’s delay before the answer could come from London.”

Giuseppe was the most conscientious of employees, but

"HOUSE OF CARDS"

he had never been confronted with a like crux. He held the key of the office and it was his duty to lock up. He wanted to get home to his supper and to the comforting companionship of Garibaldi.

"If you don't give me the letter at once," he said, "you can't get it off tonight, because the post leaves at six."

"It leaves from here at six," said Anne, "but it leaves from the G.P.O. in town as late as ten, and one can get a late fee letter sent from there up to midnight."

"Well, Signorina," Giuseppe was growing impatient. "I have to lock up the office."

"You can't," she protested. "I'm not moving from the telephone until I get in touch with Mr. Bamfield. They told me at his house that his wife will be home early and I left word that she is to ring me up at once. She will know where he is."

"Signorina," said Giuseppe with dignity, "I have been here with the Company for sixteen years and I have never made a mistake. Pardon me for saying it, but you have only just come here. You must not do strange things. I cannot yield up the key of this building to anyone. I would defend it with my life!"

"All right, Giuseppe. I admire your faithfulness. Hurry off and post those letters now and then come back here and wait for me."

Giuseppe gathered up the letters for the post, hesitated, and looked miserable. "Had promised my son . . ." he mumbled indistinctly, "Garibaldi . . ."

"I know," said Anne sympathetically. "It's hard on you; you've been working all day. You need the air. Then leave me the key and I'll be perfectly all right . . ."

"It is not suitable," the old janitor told her in shocked

tones. "It is not suitable for the Signorina to stay alone in this big place." He made a gesture with his arm which seemed to enlarge the building to colossal dimensions. "The Signorina must not think of such things. And then to contemplate going into the city alone, by tram, at night. . . . Oh, no, no . . . My wife would not do it, and still less my daughter. It is not done."

"If you can't stay, then go," said Anne with finality, "and leave the key with me. Hurry up, Giuseppe. You'll be late for the post; it's nearly six."

He threw a despairing eye at the clock, then slowly drew the key from his fob and laid it beside her with a stricken look and the air of a man parting from his birth-right. She tried to cheer him.

"It will be all right, Giuseppe. You'll see. I can take care of myself very well, and I'll be along specially early in the morning."

But Giuseppe went out with a face eloquent of despair.

Anne locked the door behind him, dressed herself in her outdoor things, put the letter and contracts into her handbag and then sat by the switchboard, waiting. The minutes dragged by. The office was a different place at night. In the silence the whole building seemed to come alive with new noises of its own, a creaking and stirring and rustling. Darkness fell, but she did not dare turn on the lights. There were no blinds in the large windows; the office was in a very unfrequented road, and as Giuseppe had pointed out to her, no one ever worked in it after six o'clock. She judged it better not to draw attention to the place by unusual illuminations. An hour dragged by as she sat in the darkness, waiting. Then she rang up the convent to say she would not be home for supper.

She might be late; would they see that someone remained up to admit her? The lay sister did not sound pleased at this communication. Anne began to get cold and hungry; the thick darkness pressing in around her was becoming terrifying. It was eight o'clock before the telephone shrilled, with a noise startling in the silence. Mrs. Bamfield sounded anxious and, when the matter was explained to her, agreed that her husband should be consulted at once.

"He's at Viani's," she said. "No, you'd never have found it. It's a little place we discovered. Two college friends turned up unexpectedly today, Harvard alumni, you know. He took them out for the evening. I had to come back because one of the children isn't well. Look, when you ring Viani's, ask for Monsieur Rudolph, the head waiter. He knows Henry and he'll be able to find him quickly."

Anne put through the second call. Both the telephone bell and her own voice made a monstrous noise in the listening silence of the building. After what appeared an interminable wait, Bamfield himself was speaking. "M-M-Miss Farrelly," surprise made his stammer troublesome.

"Oh, Lord! Yes, of course, it must go tonight. It's most fearfully urgent. Let me see, oh, the deuce of it. I've let the chauffeur go. Look, it will have to be posted from here anyhow. Could you possibly bring it here to me?"

With relief she hastened from the building and ran along the deserted road to the tram; two slow, grinding rides, with five minutes' delay between them. It was after nine when she stood timidly in Viani's vestibule and sent in word by the porter. Bamfield hastened out. In evening dress, with the stray lock very much in evidence, he looked

more than ever like a poet. He took the documents from her without speaking and twice appended his signature.

"You'll post it for me, too?" he said. "I'm tied up here with a bunch of fellows. Add the late-fee stamps." He looked at her at last over the rims of his glasses, his ingenuous grey eyes full of diffident gratitude.

"I-I-I-it's impossible for me to say what that means to me." He got out the words with difficulty. "M-m-most girls would just have sent them without looking. Had they gone to London unsigned, it would have meant a week's delay and censure for me."

It was incidents such as the foregoing, each trifling but accumulative in effect, that set Anne's feet moving with certainty on the road to administrative heights.

Chapter Five

"EVEN little Anna-Maria has caught on now. She's only five, you know, Daddy. I was in the garden with the others on Sunday when I saw the *parroco* waddling in, so I sent Anna to tell her mother. The Marchesa said, 'Very good, Bimba, I'm coming down,' and Anna told her, 'Oh, no hurry, Mamma, Beppa showed him into the *salon* and is still there with him, *adunque è tutto felice per ora!*' "

Mr. Veysey-Smith chuckled appreciatively, encouraging his daughter, whom he plainly adored.

"These *padri* are ghastly," Mrs. Veysey-Smith concurred in her weary voice.

Anne assumed a stony expression and fixed her eyes on the beautiful flowers in the centre of the table. She had been installed as paying guest in this family several weeks ago. The Bamfields had recommended the place to her. The Veysey-Smiths were English people, who liked an occasional paying guest, and their beautifully appointed flat was within a stone's throw of the office. It had seemed a most convenient arrangement. But Anne had almost at once encountered a very uncongenial atmosphere in her new home. The Veysey-Smiths were Anglomaniacs of the most rabid kind. The grandfather had been born in England and Mr. Veysey-Smith himself had spent part of his boyhood there, but none of the others had ever seen its shores. They were of colonial birth and upbringing, which

perhaps made them thus militantly pro-English, worshippers of King and Empire. They believed that everything English was good, simply by virtue of its being English, and they considered the superiority of the English people over all the other races of the earth one of the unwritten laws of God.

Their outlook also included a profound contempt for Catholicism, which they considered low, degrading, and silly. It was fair game for their jests. They did not believe that an educated mind could accept it. When an intelligent person appeared to do so, then he was faking, or cowed by tradition, or habit. To the Veysey-Smiths, the great English religious upheaval of the nineteenth century, with its leaven in the Oxford Movement, was as though it had never been. They knew nothing about it. They were full of the misapprehensions of an Orangeman who, after all, thought Anne enraged, doesn't even pretend to be educated, whereas these people claim to be cultured. The narrow-minded prejudices of the Veysey-Smiths were amazing, considering how widely they had travelled. They referred to Italians as dagoes, and despised Italy, the country of their adoption, because it was steeped in that religion which they condemned; in that universal dispraisal, they belittled all Italy's achievements, even in the arts and the mechanical sciences.

Anne was not twenty-four hours in the house before she had crossed swords with them all on the two questions of race and religion. They were plainly disconcerted to learn that she was pro-Italian and a Catholic, and their conversation became less exuberantly positive while they digested the unwelcome news. Their native politeness had a difficult struggle with their natural inclinations, and

their tongues were slightly curbed, but far from being silenced. Before a month had passed, Anne became very weary of the duels with Aline, which seemed inevitable every time the daughter of the house joined them at table. Today, Anne ignored the gauntlet thrown at her and continued to stare abstractedly into space.

She would certainly have to push off somewhere else quite soon and what a pity, she thought. She might have been so happy here if their prejudices did not create such an atmosphere of discomfort that she found it impossible either to relax in it or be herself.

Her room was so charming, furnished in perfect taste, with French windows opening on to a balcony from which, on clear days, she could see the pink peak of Monte Rosa. The trim maid brought her breakfast every morning on a silver tray with a silver service and lovely old china. The linen on the little mahogany bedstead was real, the pillow being covered with an exquisitely embroidered sham, removed every evening with the silk counterpane. The Veysey-Smiths' good standard of living, the smoothness and economy of the household routine, were a delight to Anne's unsophistication.

Meanwhile Aline flowed on about the *parroco*, and Anne strove to close her ears to that racy outpouring in English, Italian, and dialect, typical of the English girl's conversational style. She was a brilliant talker with a wonderful power of mimicry and rare linguistic ability. When she was telling one of her amusing anecdotes, she would slip with careless facility from English into Italian, French or German, or into an effective mimicry of the Italian north country dialects. Her father was usually her most appreciative listener. Proud of her attainments, he encouraged her to the top of his bent.

She appeared in the home only from Tuesday to Friday, spending the long week end at a country house, where she taught English to the daughter of a certain Marchesa. Besides being well paid for this service, she was handsomely entertained, and she lived for these week ends, as for a period of pleasure and luxury. During her intervals at home, she went out very little, but she sewed and embroidered, industriously attended to her clothes, and still more elaborately to her toilet. She was a handsome girl, with reddish-gold curly hair, which she brushed for a stated time night and morning; she also gave it frictions and massages and singes and shampoos that made it gleam with rich lustre, and she was inordinately proud of it. Under that crowning glory, her light blue eyes, however, had a cold repellent stare, her skin was rather coarse, freckled, and hairy, and she had a tight hard mouth. The family were dullish every Tuesday when she came back to them, and she brought with her the breath of a life more spacious and glamorous than their own way of living. But Anne experienced a sinking of heart when Aline reappeared at table. The Italian *nobili* with whom she spent her week ends were professedly Catholics, but seemed steeped in anticlericalism. The parish priest of their village was the butt of all their jokes. He was represented in Aline's stories as the disagreeable personage of Protestant Alliance fiction; fat, greasy, ignorant, crawlingly subservient to the *nobili*, avaricious, sly, greedy about food, and coarse in his behaviour. He called at the *palazzo* every Sunday, but according to Aline, he was in his true element in the kitchen among the servant girls. Anne passionately did not believe in the picture. With her ears burning, her face would set in stony lines, while the family rocked with

laughter, and the old deaf grandfather pathetically entreated, "What, what?"

Her Irish common sense told her that this rural parish priest could not be so entirely bad: he was probably poor and humble, probably capable of self-sacrifice and genuinely trying to sanctify himself and serve God, albeit in a muddled fashion. Sometimes she checked Aline's flow of anecdote with an obstinate and rude denial, "It's not true." Aline's cold stare would be turned on her, the tight lips would curl, and the meal peter out in a constrained silence. On other occasions, as now, she would not interrupt, too weary to do battle, marking her disapproval only by a scowl. When she saw Aline's red curls reappear at lunch on Tuesdays, she would say to herself with a sigh: "'Twill be the *parroco* again," and the *parroco* it always was. Did these people, Anne often asked herself, do nothing in the week ends but watch the parish priest until he gave them fresh material for their gibes?

Aline's father was a neat, dapper little man of middle age, rapidly going bald, with a reddish-white military moustache, recalling Aline's colouring. He was determinedly cheerful and breezy, setting the tone of the bright conversation that Anne found so subtly irritating. He spent his days working in an office, being an agent for something or another, but work was never discussed. Anne suspected he was a bad provider and that a paying guest was an asset to the household.

His wife was in many ways a surprising mistress of the lovely home she ruled. Tall, thin, and angular, with straight, greying hair dragged austere back from a shallow, lined face, sharp and bitter in expression, her clothes were the most astonishing feature: she wore rough shoes

and coarse stockings, a plain tweed skirt and a man's cardigan buttoned up to her chin, entirely concealing her blouse. The discontent written on her face was the problem of her personality.

The fourth member of that household, the old grandfather, was a pathetic figure. He was terribly aged and sat in his room all day, but he preferred to dine with the family. He was always last to arrive at table. They would stand behind their chairs until they heard the banging of his stick along the tiled floor of the passage. Then his son would go forward to help him into his chair, relieve him of his stick, and push the chair into position against the table. When the old man was finally installed, he was so stooped that his quavering chin almost touched the cloth. He had a good old face, lined like parchment, a few single silver hairs remaining on his pink scalp. He was deaf and made very little attempt to follow the conversation, unless there was a joke and a laugh. Then he would ask eagerly what it was and the words would have to be shouted into his ear until the joke, probably a poor one to start with, lost all its sap by dint of shouted explanations. His sight seemed to be dim too, and he would fumble round the table for the salt, or his tumbler, until someone, usually Mrs. Veysey-Smith, guided his hand rather abruptly to what he sought. Anne believed that he never really saw her and had only the vaguest notion of who she was. He was descending into the dim regions of dotage and saw life's players merely as shadowy figures.

One morning Anne overslept and woke only when the maid brought in her coffee. She was usually dressed at this time, and she hurried off to the bathroom later than was her habit. It was next to the grandfather's room. Mrs.

Veysey-Smith suddenly bounced in there and, without closing the old man's door, she began to scold him at the top of her voice. Anne felt most embarrassed, as it was obvious her hostess did not know there was anyone within hearing. Before she could make her escape, she had heard too much. She could hardly believe her ears that it was Mrs. Veysey-Smith speaking, so shrewish and shrill were her tones, so unrestrained her fury, so intense her bitterness.

Her grievance was that the grandfather, when washing himself, habitually spilled water around his washstand. His daughter-in-law told him many times that she wouldn't, she couldn't, endure it. Anne could imagine the old man with his quavering chin, standing like a culprit at his washstand, taking his scolding meekly and saying nothing. Mrs. Veysey-Smith stormed that she had put a rubber mat there for him specially, a very large mat that she had taken all the trouble in the world to procure; but it was all to no purpose, he made the same horrible mess of the parquet floor every morning; she couldn't stand it; she wouldn't stand it; she was at the end of her endurance, the very end. Didn't he know that her arms were dragged out of their sockets every morning, trying to restore the polish? What did he mean? He wasn't fit to live in normal society if that was how he behaved. The old man never answered a word.

It was a revelation to Anne. She had not thought about it, but of course she should have known that Mrs. Veysey-Smith herself did a very large proportion of the household work; such immaculate cleanliness and order could hardly have been maintained by one maid only. But the mistress did not work cheerfully. Obviously she resented it. Under-

neath the lovely veneer of courtesy, the soft speech and polite manners, she nursed bitter, begrudging feelings. Old age was a burden and she chafed because it was foisted on her; she bitterly blamed it for the helplessness that was its prerogative. And the highly polished floor so unkind to the shambling gait of old age, was infinitely more important than charity, or peace, or comfort.

There were two guests the same night for dinner, elderly cousins of the Smiths, bankers by occupation, just arrived from a cruise terminating at Genoa. The dinner in their honour was particularly good. The grandfather was absent from table. As thoughts of him lay heavily on Anne's spirits, she gave only an abstracted ear to the animated conversation, until she became aware that the Pope was on the *tapis*. The two guests set out to explain to the Veysey-Smiths exactly how the Pope was at the bottom of all the trouble in Europe; there would be universal happiness if it were not for his machinations. Once again Anne and her susceptibilities were forgotten as the family and their guests settled down with relish to the topic. When Anne threw out a contradiction or two, she was completely ignored; they seemed not even to hear her. The food tasted of ashes. Aline had plenty of cynical comments to make on religious hypocrisy, and the cousins egged her on with applause. Then one of the suave usurers took the discussion back to Popes of the past:

“Take Benedict XV,” he said.

“Oh, why not Alexander VI,” Anne jeered, “he's the best target of the lot; he'd last all evening!”

But the speaker merely glanced at her benignly. Either he was deaf, or he did not in the least understand her meaning, for it never seemed to occur to him that one of

his audience was out of sympathy. He fingered the stem of his wine glass and leaned impressively across the table as he enlarged on his theme:

"That Benedict, nothing but a politician from first to last. And was he not the basest sort of politician, always using his position for his personal advantage? Take his conduct in the great War; it was simply shameful how he prolonged it, siding like that with the Germans when they were so obviously in the wrong and so deservedly beaten . . ."

He glanced round the table at the faces of his kindred, who were deferentially absorbed in the exposition of his views.

"Popes," concurred Mr. Veysey-Smith, "are a perfect nuisance in European affairs, always pushing a stick into a hornet's nest when they find one. They're the bane of politics. There should be concerted action on the part of all Governments against them. We ought not to stand for it. We're fools to stand for it."

"You're wrong," Anne interrupted with sudden harsh anger, "you haven't a shred of evidence for these charges. You're just voicing the most narrow sort of prejudice." She spoke loudly, but her voice broke suddenly. Weariness came down on her like a mountain. She could think of no arguments. She felt outnumbered.

"According to you, if he's silent, he's in the wrong, and if he speaks he's still more disastrously wrong. Can't you see how prejudice blinds you to all reason?"

She struggled to explain to them, then glanced round the ring of hostile faces, and gave up. She rose to her feet and for a second stood looking down on the table with its shaded lights and choice flowers, its snowy napery,

gleaming glass, and shining cutlery, as she made a violent effort to control herself. Then she walked from the room, closing the door softly behind her.

In her room she pulled out her Italian books from the desk and slammed them on the table, trembling at the violence of her anger. She wanted to smash something to relieve her feelings.

“It’s hell’s own business,” she muttered. “Here I am in a country known as the cradle of the Church, *la culla della Chiesa*, or such is the boast, and I was drawn here by the religious magnet as well as every other lure. And this is what I have to put up with. Well, I won’t put up with it; I just won’t . . .”

She forced back the tears that were threatening and resolutely applied herself to her textbook. After half an hour or so, the maid knocked and entered with a tray on which the remainder of the dinner was set out. “I am sorry to give you this trouble,” Anne told her. But the maid was a simple little soul from the mountain regions, over-worked and downtrodden, speaking only a difficult dialect. She merely stared uncomprehendingly at Anne and withdrew. Sounds of merriment came from the drawing room. The visiting cousins did not leave until a late hour.

Early the following morning, Mrs. Veysey-Smith came into Anne’s room with an ingratiating smile. “We are all sorry,” she said, “that your feelings got hurt, and I have come to apologise for the family.” Then she went on to apologise more particularly, not for the guests, but, surprisingly, for Aline. Anne was amazed at the twist she gave the whole incident. With a certain shock of dismay, she learned now that Mrs. Veysey-Smith was not Aline’s mother, but her stepmother; and that she detested her

stepdaughter even more cordially than she detested her father-in-law. As the older woman flowed on and on, becoming ever more bitterly eloquent, it was evident that the condemnation of Aline was a favourite if repressed topic. Anne told her gently several times that the incident could now be closed and forgotten, that she herself was to blame for becoming stupidly emotional over a matter which, after all, was a legitimate subject for discussion, but Mrs. Veysey-Smith was now fairly launched on her grievances and was not to be put off.

"It has been the same with anyone I have ever had in the house," she went on. "No matter who they are, Aline succeeds in making them uncomfortable. She has no trace of gentleness in her nature. She doesn't know what it means to have consideration for others. She's the most selfish creature I have ever known in my whole life, selfish, selfish, selfish." Anne felt very embarrassed. The cold anger of Mrs. Veysey-Smith's tone was intimidating. Her face was positively dreadful as, with narrowed eyes and lips tightly compressed, she seemed to stare stonily back into the past. "It was the same with my own babies, you know. When they were ill, she never paid the least attention . . ."

"Have you children of your own?" Anne asked her.

"I had," Mrs. Veysey-Smith's face twitched. "They all died before they reached the age of six. Two boys and a girl . . ."

Anne sat on the edge of her bed in silence. She knew she was in the presence of tragedy. Words seemed useless. "The eldest was within a week of her sixth birthday," her hostess continued. "She was so — so lovely. . . . We were out East at the time and I think the climate there did not suit babies. But Aline — Aline used to be simply terrible

then, and she was only a young girl. She never cared at all when I was up night after night. She does not know what sympathy means. She used to go about her own business just the same. . . . She went to a party the very day my little girl died. . . ."

"I am sorry," Anne told her, distressed at having unwittingly probed a sorrow that the years had covered up but not effaced, so that it still seemed to hurt Mrs. Veysey-Smith like a raw wound.

She walked to the office in a sober mood that morning. The illusion was dispelled now. When she first came to them, Anne had marvelled at the family unity. They were invariably polite and cheerful to one another and their manners were irreproachable. No argument ever seemed to arise to set a ripple stirring on the bright, limpid pool of their conversation. They enjoyed the same jokes, very mild jokes, gave the same interpretation to the news of the day, and relished the same sort of gossip. She had thought it would be most desirable to reach that calm "judicial platform of thought" which the Veysey-Smiths seemed to occupy, whence the whole passing show of life could be observed with suave equanimity.

It was a radiant day, but she shivered to recall the darkly brooding eyes of Mrs. Smith. There was hatred in that family, all the more evil in that it was usually so carefully suppressed and smoothly hidden. Hatred is an ugly force. She had never encountered it before; indeed, she had hardly believed it existed. She had never even imagined such a state of affairs as obtained among the Smiths. There had been a certain amount of squabbling in the old home in Pallasgrange: disputes among the sisters, and minor scenes when one of them rebelled against their aunt's

harsh regime. But essentially all the members of that little household were devoted and loyal to one another. Their feelings were more praiseworthy than their manners. She wondered rather sadly what Mr. Veysey-Smith's real position was between the two women: the daughter whom he loved and admired, and the wife whom he must have found an indispensable helpmate, yet who clearly hated his daughter and resented the burden of his aged father.

The group around the family table now shifted position. When Aline reverted to her favourite topic of the country *parroco*, Anne would encounter a look of sympathy from Mrs. Veysey-Smith. But the new alliance did nothing to console her. “I must get away from them,” became her constant thought. “I must move on again.”

Chapter Six

SHORTLY after that incident of the signatures, Bamfield made a certain recommendation about Anne to the London office on the ground that she had already acquired Italian, and had thereby become more valuable to the company, with the result that her remuneration was increased by twenty-five pounds a year. It seemed riches to Anne. She now had a salary equivalent to about six pounds a week in English money. She was acquiring an elegant wardrobe; she could send home occasional presents to her aunt and sisters. She now could even look forward to saving a little for the future.

Presently she began to perceive that there was a tincture of jealousy among the office staff on account of her rapid promotion. The cashier was the first to know about it, and the news spread. They whispered among themselves that it was not quite just: the Signorina was very young and she had been there such a short while. Look at that poor Signora Piazza: she had no one to depend on but herself, and she had given fifteen years' service to the company, with the same salary as on the day she started.

But even before her promotion, Anne tended toward unpopularity. She had a rooted dislike for gossip, the chief diversion in the office. The favourite subject of discussion was, of course, Bamfield. The whole of the staff, from the chief engineer down to Giuseppe, dearly enjoyed gossip,

particularly with a titbit of speculative scandal thrown in. Her two companions in the typists' room, the Signora Piazza and the Signora Chiesa, liked nothing better than to drop their hands in their laps on every opportunity that offered and chatter away endlessly about their employer like a pair of magpies. Anne would work on, ignoring them. The two little widows had an exaggerated admiration for Bamfield and a vast curiosity about his domestic life. Sometimes Anne held lengthy conversations over the telephone with Mrs. Bamfield, if the latter happened to ring up during her husband's absence. When Anne put back the receiver, her two companions would look at her eagerly, waiting for her to translate every word for their benefit, and they exchanged sour, disappointed looks when she silently resumed her work.

If Bamfield summoned one of these widows to his office, which he did on rare occasions, she would go up with a startled and delighted air, as though called into the presence of a deity. When she returned, she would relate to the other every single word that had taken place, interspersed with sundry exclamations about the genius, the surpassing benevolence, and the great wisdom of Americans. One day, Signora Piazza returned beaming from some such trivial interview and exclaimed as she threw down her papers:

"Per me, per me, quel 'uomo è un dio." (I really believe that that man is a god.)

"You're old enough to have sense," Anne told her sharply. The two little women looked shocked. Really the English Mees was rude, positively rude. (It was useless for Anne to protest that she was Irish; she was always the English Mees in their conversation.)

Such incidents made her unpopular. Her devotion to duty irked the whole staff. They argued that it was one thing to do one's best, fulfil one's agreement, and carry out the work for which one was paid, but it was quite another matter to behave like the English Mees, to come to the office before the official time and not leave it until after hours; to keep one's face bent over papers all day long; scarcely to return the greetings of the very nice young men who so pleasantly proffered them; to talk to no one except the Signor Bamfield; to be so grim when one was so young. Oh, no, they did not like the English Mees; she was too strange.

When Spring came to Italy, in the gardens of that exclusive residential quarter where the Veysey-Smiths lived, the pear trees began to veil themselves in sprays of bridal blossom. About this time, she noticed Bamfield keeping up with the correspondence very closely. He seemed anxious to leave nothing stand over from the day's work, not even the answering of a post card, and he kept her hard at work going through the files and picking up every tiny thread of unfinished business. This change in his methods surprised her, but she made no comment. One morning, when she had finished answering the day's letters, he said to her with a smile:

“Well, we've completed the office spring cleaning now. I wanted you to have a fresh start and no back worries. I'm going to America next week. I'll be absent for about five weeks. You know, Noggs and I haven't been home for seven years. My annual holiday is about two years overdue. I don't mind telling you, Miss Farrelly, I wouldn't go only that you're here. You'll keep the ball rolling, I know. Now, look: Engineer Ragazzi is coming up from

the Rome office to take my place. He'll have my key to the building. He'll be nominally in charge, but you'll be virtually in charge, see? He'll deal with customers and contracts and all that. But he knows no English, or scarcely any. You must deal with the London end yourself. Help Ragazzi in every way he wants, and get every letter answered. Just beat up the different departments until you get answers out of them. You'll have to keep at it, for they're tough."

"I think I know," Anne responded. "I'll do my best."

During the ensuing week, Bamfield daily amplified his instructions. She was to see that the weekly report of business was sent every Friday to London; she was to make sure Ragazzi checked it and signed it. Keep a good face on things to London. If she was in any doubt, serious doubt on a serious matter, then cable London for instructions, but dissuade Ragazzi from sending frivolous cables.

Two days after Bamfield's departure, she was standing by his vacant desk in the middle of the forenoon tranquilly filing away the correspondence of the previous evening. Things were going well enough. She found the work quite easy with Ragazzi's help. He was a nervous little elderly man with an apologetic and courteous air, and dreadfully deferential to Anne, due no doubt to certain remarks Bamfield had made to him before leaving.

Ragazzi had gone that morning to the other side of the city to check up the details of a specification. Such was his real work, for he was an engineer, and he had escaped from the managing director's chair with a relief so obvious that it was comical. Anne had the room to herself and she was availing herself of the opportunity to straighten the files and clear Bamfield's desk.

It was a glorious day, with a burning blue sky; March in Italy was like June in Ireland. As she stood there pushing in and out the drawers of the filing cabinet, a movement on the low flat roof of the factory on the opposite side of the road caught her eye. A man had emerged, fluttering a dirty strip of red rag in his hand; he was dressed in the faded blue linen suit worn by the factory hands, and he was talking boisterously to some companions still hidden below. The workingmen always brought their lunch (consisting of a loaf, a hunk of cheese, and a flask of red wine) to the factory, but it was still only eleven o'clock. Anne watched with growing alarm as the first man was joined by three or four workmates, then by six or seven, which group had soon grown to a dozen. Are they just larking, she thought, and what is the foreman doing? In a few minutes the roof was covered with swarming humanity; as the men emerged, they sat down in groups, talking excitedly.

Anne had been so absorbed in the affairs of the office since Bamfield went away, she had not given a thought to the factory. The idea of any hitch occurring there had not crossed her mind. She knew very little about it, except that it was equipped with elaborate and expensive machinery, and had a vast storeroom where supplies were kept, pending delivery; she knew that Bamfield utterly relied on the foreman. She had only once set foot in the building to find Bamfield when he had been urgently wanted and no messenger was available. She remembered an interior that was a vision of confusion: the noise was deafening, and blue-clad figures with grimy hands and faces were hurrying in every direction; it was fearfully hot and the air was rank; a row of latrines stood directly

opposite the entrance. At the sound of her voice, Bamfield had hurried out of an office directly inside the door, giving her a look of annoyance and a curt answer, which she had interpreted as a prohibition to go into the place again. She had observed that unspoken rule.

She now contemplated the sea of faces on the opposite roof with a sense of helplessness. It was such unknown territory. The men were singing in unison with a sort of mass ferocity:

Bandiera rossa s'innalzera.

Evviva il socialismo e la libertà.

“It’s a strike,” she cried out aloud, bewildered. “If I’m right, then the hands have taken possession and they have everything at their command: machinery, fittings, equipment, stores, everything.”

She heard rapid footsteps. Ragazzi dashed into the room. He was very pale.

“Mees, mees, it is a strike, a sit-down strike. You must go home at once and stay there until I send for you. Please to give me your address. I have to go back to Rome this very day. My office is there you know, and it is the same story in Rome, all most dreadful confusion. They have telephoned for me to come queek.”

Anne sat down in Bamfield’s chair and drew the book of cable forms toward her, mechanically adjusting the carbon paper under the first sheet.

“What are you doing, Signorina?”

“We must tell them in London.”

“Oh, no, no,” Ragazzi was scornful. “The gentlemen in London, they cannot settle the strike. What is the use?”

“They have to be told, anyway,” said Anne, beginning

to print in the address. "Have they started any sabotage?" she nodded toward the window.

"No, no. It will not come to that with our men. But they have to obey the union. Look, Signorina, *don't* tell London," Ragazzi's voice was almost tearfully pleading. "It may blow over today and tomorrow the sun may be out again, everyone laughing, all the wheels going round. . . ." He nearly spun in a circle with the eloquence of his gestures to indicate the factory working happily at full speed.

Anne was only half attending. She was running her finger up and down the code book. Two words embodied the message: "Sit-down strike of mechanics declared throughout Italy just now. Our men involved. Will keep you fully informed."

She pulled the cable out of the book and looked up. "You're wrong, Signor Ragazzi. This isn't a domestic trouble we can settle ourselves. It's a national trouble beyond our control. You can't hush it up: it will be in the London evening papers and if we didn't send this cable immediately, we'd just get an angry enquiry from them tomorrow morning. There are a thousand reasons why they should know in the London office before the evening papers tell them. Don't you remember that we pushed through a big contract here some time ago? We couldn't fill it all from the factory here and they're completing the deliveries from London. There are lorry loads of material going into the factory every day to be assembled. At least we can stop those deliveries, and if there's the slightest danger of wrecking, lessen the company's loss by just that much anyhow."

It was perhaps the longest speech she had ever made in Italian. Ragazzi stared at her.

She picked up the telephone receiver and listened for the *Allò* that was always so prompt from the switchboard. She wanted Giuseppe. But there was no answer now and she jabbed impatiently at the instrument. "All chattering," she thought, "how the staff will be chattering. . . ."

Ragazzi shook his head at her sorrowfully. "There is no one there," he said, "the staff was leaving as I came up."

"What!" she jumped to her feet. "The staff quitting too! But *we're* not mechanics! We don't belong to a trade-union!"

"Oh, but it will be very dangerous to stay here," Ragazzi told her. "Everyone must leave."

She looked out of the window. The employees were in full retreat down the road: the engineers, the draughtsmen, the accountant, the cashier, the clerks, and among them for greater protection, walking sedately like two little black sparrows, were the Signora Chiesa and the Signora Piazza. The men squatting on the low roof opposite ironically surveyed their departure, and chanted desirively in chorus:

"Evviva il socialismo e la libertà!"

But she did not see Giuseppe. With the cable in her hand, she dashed from the room and raced downstairs. He stood just inside the door, ready to leave, his face a picture of misery and irresolution. Neither his wandering eye nor his good eye met Anne's.

"We will have to go," he mumbled dully. "It will be dangerous to stay. . . ."

"All right," said Anne. "I understand. But place this with the cable office on your way."

Giuseppe took the cable with his usual delicate gesture.

“*Si, si, Signorina.* Do you want the key?” He held it out humbly.

“No, Giuseppe. I know you’ll come back when you think you can. I’ll have Signor Ragazzi’s key. That’s all right now. Hurry that cable.” She patted his shoulder. The old fellow was almost in tears. He shambled miserably out.

She leaped upstairs again, taking two steps at a time, a queer sense of exultation surging through her. She had always wanted responsibility and Lord knows she had it now! She found Ragazzi slamming his desk and locking up.

“You know, Signor,” she said, “pardon my saying this, but it’s my opinion that you should stand by here, instead of running off to Rome like that. After all, there’s no factory in Rome; it’s an inconsiderable branch of the company’s business, and you’re leaving this place without even a nominal head. . . .”

Ragazzi flung out his hands in a frenzied gesture of despair.

“Signorina,” he protested, “you don’t understand. You say that because you really understand nothing, nothing. I am responsible for the Roman office, absolutely and solely responsible. They sent for me urgently when the crisis broke out. I have many contracts in hand there, and now the work will have to be stopped, much of it at a critical stage. All is confusion there; the customers will be seeking me; it is terrible. Besides we cannot stay here. No one can stay here. The union insists that the company’s business be absolutely suspended.”

Anne gave up. Ragazzi’s wife and family were in Rome; they were the real ture, for the excitable little man needed

to be comforted. It was obvious from the moment he came that he hated his temporary elevation to managerial office. As an engineer, she thought, he may be clever and dependable, but as a managing director in a crisis, he's absolutely useless.

"Very well," she said quietly. "I suppose you know best. But leave me your key, Signor. I may want to get in before you're back from Rome." He laid it obediently on the table beside her.

"I'd dearly like," she went on, "to have a word with Banfi for a minute." Banfi was the Swiss foreman of the factory.

"I saw him," Ragazzi told her. "I called in there on my way up. He says he's afraid to leave the place just yet in case the fellows lock him out, and also he thinks that if he stays, he'll be able to prevent disorder. He's very popular with the men, and he's going to see the whole thing through with them."

"Come along now," continued Ragazzi. "My car is outside, and I can give you a lift home. It's none too safe. There are a few bad boys among that crowd over there," nodding toward the factory, "and you'd never know when they'd start pegging stones and cursing us as *grassi borghesi*."

If anything irritated Anne, it was the suggestion of being sent home out of the way like a schoolgirl, but she answered lightly:

"I won't go just for a minute or two. I'll tidy up and have a look round. You hurry off, Signor, or you'll miss your train. I'll be all right."

Ragazzi looked at her with surprise.

"You English Mees," he said. "You're simply extraordinary, extraordinary."

“I see you live round the corner,” he continued, glancing at her address. “Well, when you go out, don’t leave by the front door. There’s a little lane just at the left below the side door. If you slip round that way, you can make out your road by a devious route. It will take you ten minutes longer, but it’s safer than walking up that road in view of the factory. Do you understand?”

She nodded. It was the first helpful thing he had said that morning. She knew the laneway in question and had already been considering its possibilities as an unobserved exit.

“Another good thing to do,” said Ragazzi, warming to it, “would be to ring up the foreman every day from your home. He told me that he’d stick to his office as long as the fellows keep possession of the factory. If things get worse, telegraph to me, and I’ll come up immediately. Not that I can do much, of course,” he gestured, “we’re absolutely in the hands of the union. But anyhow I’ll come.”

Anne assented.

“Good-by, Signor.”

Ragazzi ran downstairs and the front door slammed behind him. From the back of the room (for she no longer wanted to be observed from the other side of the road), Anne watched his departure. Every eye on the roof was fixed on him, and there was dead silence. Most of the men were beginning on their lunch, biting deep into their long loaves; nearly all the jaws were in motion. Ragazzi made several ineffectual attempts to start the car before the engine hummed. Finally, it slid away from the pavement and the watchers on the roof raised a boisterous cheer. Swiftly Anne dragged Bamfield’s desk from its position

near the window back into a corner where she could work in peace without being seen from the roof opposite. Then she sat down with squared shoulders and reconsidered the position. She was pleasantly excited, but not in the least afraid. If the truth were told, she was thoroughly enjoying herself.

She began by making a tour of the whole deserted building. The silent rooms were sun drenched, and their bright warmth added to her sense of tranquillity. As she had feared, the staff had made a disorderly and hasty retreat. Account books, ledgers, and plans were left open; one draughtsman had actually dropped his pen in the middle of a line. She closed all the books, tidied the scattered work into the desks, and fastened every window in the building, springing up to reach the catches. Wherever she found a key, she turned it in the lock and withdrew the key, tying all the keys together in a bunch. She found that the cashier had locked his desk and simply left the key on the inkstand. “Idiot,” she muttered. She opened the desk: it contained about forty pounds in cash, several pounds’ worth of stamps, together with cheque books and pay orders. She packed all these into her attaché case. Everything that she could lock, she locked. “If they raid the place some night,” she thought, “I’ll give them a little trouble. They’ll have a run for their money.”

She seated herself at the switchboard and rang up Banfi. He sounded startled and almost horrified, but she cut short his exclamations. Had he telephoned the station, telling them to stop delivery at the factory? Oh, yes, he had, and he had also rung up every other centre that might be delivering material; in fact, he had absolutely stopped all incoming business. Did he fear disorder? No, the fel-

lows were very good humoured and still mostly under his control, but one never knew what might happen, or what spirit would enter into them. Anyway, he was resolved not to quit the office until the strike was over. Anne told him that she, too, would be in the office every day and that if he wanted anything done, he need only ring her.

She rang up the flat to say she would not be home to lunch. Mrs. Veysey-Smith was politely concerned. Should she send something down? No, on no account. Anne added that she would be home to dinner.

There was an amazing amount to be done, and the silent afternoon hours passed very quickly. A few cables came in from American offices, the ordinary routine business of the day. To all of them, Anne sent the same reply: "*Lockout strike here. Business temporarily suspended.*" She had to telephone the answers to the G.P.O., as she did not want to show herself unnecessarily on the street. This was rather troublesome, because she was not yet expert in the language. The letters of every code word had to be checked by geographical name equivalents. Thus, if the word happened to be AVICE, it would have to be given: A for Acqui, V for Verona, I for Italia, C for Como, E for Emilia, and then the post-office clerk would check over the word by repeating it in the same way.

A few telegrams came from Italian consumers enquiring about their deliveries. She had to get the information from Banfi before she could frame replies. The foreman was plainly irritated and apprehensive to find she was carrying on the work. Late in the afternoon, a cable came from London. It contained only five letters, the code word for "Keep us fully informed," but to Anne that terse message was eloquent. Methodically, she finished the filing

where she had been interrupted in the morning, and then wrote a long summary of the day's events to London.

As the sun went down, the men quitted the roof. At dusk, there was an animated scene on the opposite side of the road, when the women came to the factory, bringing food to their menfolk. They carried trays, baskets, cans, boxes and parcels, crowding, pushing, and jostling around the entrance, with much shouting and laughter and good-humoured raillyery in Milanese dialect. Anne peeped at the scene from an upper window and caught a glimpse of Banfi, leaning against the passage wall inside, looking on with a smile, plainly pretending to treat the affair as a first-class joke. When this traffic had died away and the men had retired indoors again with their parcels of food, she thought it an opportune moment to make an unobserved exit. As she hastened down the stairs with her heavy attaché case, a violent rattling at the front door made her heart stand still. They were coming! She was too late! She darted back to an upper window cautiously to reconnoitre. The men were streaming out of the factory and filling the roadway in knots and groups. Half a dozen or more were trying the office door. Banfi was leaning against the opposite wall, watching them, with a look of frowning apprehension which he made no attempt to hide.

Anne retreated again to the head of the stairs where she sat and listened. She would not admit fear, but her heart was thumping in her breast. The two doors to the building were strong and securely locked, but she could hear the fellows testing the resistance with their shoulders. It might not take much of their united pressure to break the locks. Others were trying the windows and swearing freely in

lurid Milanese oaths to find them fastened. A fierce hubbub of arguing was swelling in the streets, about a hundred rough voices shouting together in rapid dialect. She could not understand a word they were saying. Were they going to storm the building?

All that she most hated and feared in this land of Italy recurred to her mind: the people's fierce iconoclastic impiety underlying their gayety; their capacity, which she divined, for licentious behaviour and cold ruthlessness. She shivered. She knew she was in for a very unpleasant time if those fellows effected an entrance, and it was highly doubtful whether Banfi could or would save her in time. Anyhow, he would blame her bitterly for being there at all.

She knew too that the money she was salvaging was less than nothing to a firm whose annual turnover ran into a million. Was she a fool to be cowering there in the cold dark, a helpless prey to indescribable fears? Yet she could not have smugly retreated with the rest, just glad of an unexpected holiday. It seemed so mean to run away in Bamfield's absence. She knew he would never have been intimidated into retreat; he would have taken command of the situation with a virile assertion of authority.

While these thoughts were springing through her head, the beating of her heart became less suffocating. The tide of argument was retreating across the road. The strikers among themselves had at first agreed upon some dubious and nominal leadership and, such as it was, it had taken control and decided against forcible entry into the offices. No damage was to be done to property — as least not yet. Anne rose from her cramped position and ventured on another reconnoitre. The men were streaming back into

the factory. When the road was silent and deserted again, she slipped out by the side entrance and was annoyed to find her hand trembling violently as she locked the door behind her.

After dinner she retired to her room and read the evening papers attentively. It was necessary for her to understand the strike, so as to send a summary of its causes, developments, and effects to London on the morrow. A large industrial concern on the outskirts of the city had dismissed two men for unsatisfactory service. The men's trade-union demanded their reinstatement, the employers refused, and a lightning sit-down strike had been called in all the Italian manufacturing concerns, the mechanics taking possession of the factories. But around these simple facts, there was a dreadful fog of words. The views of the leading industrialists were set out at great length, with the opinions of the labour leaders, and the comments of the workers' council. Anne scribbled a digest of the news before she went to bed, so as to have it ready to send to London in the morning. It was after midnight before she finished and her eyes were red-rimmed and weary.

Next morning, she took her lunch to the office and settled down for a day of it. The postbox was stuffed tight with letters. Besides the usual mail, there was an hysterical outburst from the firm's customers all over the peninsula, clamouring for news, or giving fresh directions about the handling of their contracts.

One item in the morning papers troubled Anne. There was to be a big meeting of Milanese manufacturers that day. The I.E.E.C. was the third largest concern in Milan, and it seemed preposterous that they were to have no representative at this meeting. After some thought, she

rang up Banfi and asked him if he would attend. He was horrified at the suggestion and he could find a thousand reasons for not doing so.

“If I leave this office, Signorina, they may lock me out, and then we would be worse off.”

“But you know the I.E.E.C. really should have a representative at that meeting.”

“Oh, yes. But as Signor Ragazzi thought fit to leave us . . .”

She coaxed him: “Don’t leave the factory, of course — you are simply invaluable there — except for the purpose of attending this meeting. The workers are men of honour like yourself. Wouldn’t they let you out on parole, if you consulted them?”

“But, Signorina,” Banfi objected, “I am not able to talk with industrialists. I could perhaps attend a workers’ council, yes, but not a meeting of manufacturers. I have not had the education. I am a workman myself, just risen from the ranks.”

“All the more reason why they’d give you a hearing,” she encouraged him. “No one there will be able to talk better than you can about the spirit among the strikers. You’d be the most competent speaker.”

“Oh, well, we’ll see. . . . I’ll ask the men . . .” Banfi grumbled uncertainly.

“We absolutely must have someone there,” Anne repeated. “I must have first-hand information without waiting for the evening paper to tell me. If you don’t go, I’d nearly go myself. . . .”

Banfi was horrified.

“Oh, no, Signorina, you must not think of doing that. They would not admit you. It would be most unsuit-

able.... I'll talk it over with the fellows here and let you know...." An hour later, he rang her up and told her the men had agreed he should go. She saw him leave the factory.

At midday the men swarmed out on the roof again to take the air. They sang the *Bandiera rossa* until they were tired and somnolent, and then they stretched out in the sun to sleep. She saw Banfi return, a changed man. He had got into his best clothes and shaved; his face was wreathed in smiles as he strutted along, the image of self-importance. Some of the men observed him and began to shout down good-humoured jests on his grandeur. He let himself in and appeared a few minutes later on the roof: the men clustered round him, while he talked and talked. There were occasional outbursts of laughter and she surmised that he was giving them a spirited and humorous version of the affair. She waited until he had gone below again, then rang him up and embodied the gist of his report in her letter to London.

Her position now amused and delighted her. She had got Banfi to do her will. This meant she was virtually running the whole concern, the third largest manufacturing concern in Milan, she repeated to herself appreciatively.

Nearly a week went by without further incident. In several factories a certain amount of damage was done to machinery, as the men grew weary of the delays in making a settlement, causing Anne uneasiness as she read of it, but in fact the I.E.E.C. hands showed no disposition to follow suit. Banfi told her they were terribly tired of their hard beds at night and longed for a decision of the dispute. Ragazzi sent her several letters and telegrams from

Rome, addressing her as: *Stimatissima Collaboratore* and telling her he was faithfully guarding the firm's interests in Rome. She had a brief but encouraging note from London, intimating that her daily reports were much appreciated. The daily volume of letters diminished and diminished until it practically ceased. The great wheel of business had run to a standstill, but it had stopped slowly and without confusion.

One morning, the fifteenth of the strike, she saw by the newspaper placards that the dispute had been settled late the previous night. She ran on to the office to cable London. Giuseppe was already there, his face radiant. He frolicked around her like a big dog. She sent him flying home for the attaché case containing the keys, and when he limped back with it in less than ten minutes, she bade him open up all the doors and windows to air the place. Then the staff began to file in, one by one, looking sheepish.

Three weeks later, Bamfield was back at his post. He laughed when he greeted Anne:

"There *would* be an occupation strike," he said, "the very minute I turned my back for the first time in seven years!"

He spoke as though he thought very lightly of the affair, but she noticed that he spent the whole day reading back through the files, perusing her daily reports.

A fortnight later, he pushed a letter across the table to her, with the remark:

"That's of interest to you only."

She flushed with pleasure as she read the lines. It was an order from London, increasing her salary by one hundred pounds yearly, in consideration of her services during

the strike. For some months after that, she heard echoes of it from Americans calling at the office on their way through Milan. They told her jestingly that every branch in Europe knew of her fame, and that she was the heroine of the I.E.E.C.

Bamfield brought back with him, as a successor to Mr. Bruntz, one of the clerks from the New York office. The newcomer on the staff, Jim Dalton, was quiet and shy, big and stocky in build, with a large plain face. His ignorance of Italian seemed to have given him the permanent habit of silence.

Before he was a week in the office, however, the Signore Piazza and Chiesa had amassed a useful amount of information about him, and Anne, though she tried to shut her ears to the gossip, could not help hearing the details. First and most interesting point, Mr. Dalton was not married and had never been even affianced. He was a very correct young man. He did not mention Harvard or Yale, and never intimated that he had come to Europe for any other purposes than to earn his living. He had risen from the ranks. He was much younger than his appearance indicated, twenty-six rather than thirty-six. He was the sole support of a widowed mother in America, to whom he regularly sent more than half his earnings. Mr. Bamfield loved him and had already taken him greatly into his confidence.

Mr. Dalton was given the desk which Bamfield had previously occupied among the eight clerks on the ground floor. Anne now often received telephonic messages from Bamfield to take to Mr. Dalton the files relating to certain contracts. By this time she had become accustomed to the ebullient spirits of the young Italian employees. Her

entrance among them had ceased to cause a commotion. They no longer had the power to embarrass her, and she would not hesitate, if she thought it necessary, to linger at Mr. Dalton's desk while she briefly explained to him some lacuna or obscurity in the *dossier* she set before him; on such occasions she found herself getting faintly irritated by his gratitude, which seemed to her excessive for the slight service she rendered him. It soon became evident that Mr. Dalton admired her.

Every time this new factor in her office life impinged upon Anne's consciousness, her reaction was exasperation. Only then she discovered the strength of her scorn of men. And Jim Dalton was not the kind of young man to be slighted with a clear conscience.

Chapter Seven

ANNE knew it well now, that painful prelude leading to Paradise: the wait was long, cold, filled with discomfort and fatigue, but the glory that opened from it was warm, spacious, and satisfying. Her companions' names never ceased to be a temptation to titter: *Nera* and *Bianca*, simply *Black* and *White*: and to Irish ears their surnames were almost as odd as their Christian names: *Bracciaforti* and *Bellabuona* (*Strongarms* and *Beautifulgood*). But they were the dearest girls, and her good friends. They accompanied her everywhere. They knew no English and had not the least anxiety to acquire it, so that in their company, her conversational Italian improved by leaps and bounds. Both of them were elementary-school teachers and they came from Rome. They were careful to impress upon her that their Italian was particularly choice, for they spoke the Tuscan tongue with a Roman accent, the only combination for linguistic perfection.

She might never have penetrated the august portals of the *Scala* had Nera and Bianca not taken her there. The cult of opera was expensive, but they had explained to her that the front seats of the gallery were really not bad, and that if one could be content with such accommodation, one could hear every opera of the season, instead of hearing only one or two in stately comfort. After all, it was the music that mattered.

There were no theatre queues at that period in Italy. The procedure of the music lover anxious to take his pleasures economically, was to arrive at the Scala doors about an hour and a half before the performance was due to commence, put his back to the door, and resign himself to a long wait, with all the patience he could muster. Little groups and knots of people would quickly arrive and crowd up around him close to the door, too; then more and more people, until about two hundred devotees of opera were massed around the doors in a solid bunch, pressed together as closely as a swarm of bees. The pressure of bodies became hard to bear but, encouraged by Nera and Bianca, Anne learned to endure it. It is the music that matters. The cold crept up her legs and there was not room even to stamp her feet to keep them warm. If she faced the door, the pressure of the crowd on her back became terrific, as though they were trying to force her through the solid oak. If she leaned her back to the door and faced them, so as to relieve the bone-cracking intensity of their pressure, she found beyond endurance the effluvia of mingled breaths — a compound of garlic, cheap cheroots, and *birra*. The crowd was mainly good humoured, their bond of union being their worship of the same muse. They respected each other's pain in the same great cause. But sometimes minor arguments would break out, usually started by a woman, who would exclaim:

“My God, Signore, will you have some regard for my back, it is broken in two, and I feel very bad!”

“I am sorry, Signorina, but really I can do nothing about it. It is others who are pushing me.”

“I do not believe you, Signore! You are deliberately

causing me ferocious pain, jabbing at me like that with your elbow . . .”

“Not so, I assure you, Signorina. Can you not see that I myself cannot move, I can hardly breathe. . . .”

“Signore, you are an ignorant fellow. . . .”

“Patience, patience, patience,” a chorus of voices would expostulate. “We are none of us at our ease, Signorina. One has to bear it.”

These arguments always became more frequent as the great hour approached for the doors to open. When the attendant’s feet sounded in the passage, the crowd gathered itself together for a united drive through the doors. The pressure on those immediately outside the entrance became intense and suffocating. The first night she experienced it, Anne cried out in dismay. She thought she would be killed; that she must surely faint, and then the crowd would sweep on over her body. When the doors were thrown open, the people behind flung her over the threshold in a mighty heave, Nera and Bianca gasping painfully, but clinging steadfastly to her arms. Linked together, they raced along the passage: “Hurry, hurry,” they entreated her, their feet flying. They took the stairs by crouching, shoulders squared like athletes, taking three steps at a time, bounding like goats. Of course they were outdistanced by several men and boys. By not losing their breath, however, by keeping the pace well without faltering, they were among the first twenty or thirty to burst into the gallery and take possession of the front middle seats. After that, they thought only how good it was to be seated there, and the cost was forgotten.

The vast theatre, so beautifully proportioned that it seemed small, filled rapidly with a gaily chattering con-

course: military officers in light-blue uniforms; men in evening dress decorated with all kinds of insignia and orders; ladies in shimmering gowns, adorned with tiaras and glittering jewels. A subtle fragrance rose up to the gallery. As the boxes filled, Nera and Bianca whispered to Anne great names and titles. She admired the deportment of the Italian *nobili*: warmly gracious, smiling and serene, their manners were simple and unaffected; they spoke quietly, but they wore their lovely clothes with stately grace.

As the orchestra filed in, a tense and expectant silence fell on the auditorium. No one was admitted to the theatre after the opening note of the overture (to which there was always a scenic accompaniment). The frequenters of the Scala were greatly awed by the conductor, though he was only a very small man with white hair. Once the music had begun, he would not tolerate the slightest noise, not even a cough, or a shuffle of feet. The success of the opera depended upon him and his highly wrought nervous system had to be respected. He had been known to walk off and cause an opera to be abandoned because of some disturbance in the auditorium. He was a fiery, hypersensitive man, with ears preternaturally attuned to noise, and if an attendant only moved in one of the aisles, he would glare round from under his shaggy white eyebrows in a manner petrifying to the disturber.

Anne loved this discipline. It suited her mood. Moreover, the entertainment at the Scala was magnificent, and not wasted on an unworthy motif, but devised to support some theme usually elevated and noble. The first night she went there, she feared to be bored. She knew very little about music. When she discovered such genuine delight

at the Scala, she felt as though she had received the gift of something subtle and precious.

The first opera she attended was *Parsifal*. The scene during the overture impressed itself deeply on her imagination: the solitary, heroic knight toiling through the steep forbidding heights of mountain regions, seeking the guerdon of nobility through every hazard and against fearful odds. She fell in love with “the blameless fool, made wise through pity,” and followed his fortunes with tense interest, shivering with dread at his temptation by Kundry, and exulting at the victory of purity over all the forces of evil. The majestic climaxes of the German opera were the first direct religious inspiration experienced in Italy. For days afterwards, she reread the *libretto*, striving to recapture those sensations of appeasement and spiritual joy. She discovered in *Parsifal* all the conditions of happiness which were for ever eluding her in her daily life: sympathy, reverence, and a strong sense of Christian charity. She never doubted for a moment that this musical composition sprang from a mood of intense religious fervour, or that its theme was purely spiritual, free from the contamination of worldly elements. Years afterwards she read criticisms of *Parsifal*, describing it as “the expression of sublimated sensuality,” and this interpretation confounded her.

The theme rather than the music captivated her attention.

Verdi's *Rigoletto* and *Otello* made her absolutely wretched, and greatly to the surprise of Nera and Bianca, she would not hear them a second time. Following an evening at *Otello*, she spent a sleepless night. Her overwrought nerves were in confusion. The storm opening that

gloomy tragedy, and the thunderous music full of foreboding, were resounding in her ears. She was listening again to the fantastic numbers in which Otello writhes with jealousy, doubling up like a man with the colic; she shuddered at the horrible villainies of Iago, as she followed anew the sequences of that long-drawn-out, harrowing drama of jealousy.

She developed a taste for light opera, which Nera and Bianca assured her was regrettable. She heard the *Barber of Seville* many seasons in succession, without ever being one whit less amused by that music as airily inconsequential and light-hearted as its theme. She loved the arrival of Figaro with his dancing refrain:

*La ran la lera
La ran la la. . . .*

or:

*Ah bravo Figaro!
Bravo bravissimo
Fortunatissimo
Per veritá*

and she could be gleeful again and again about the laundry list that was mistaken for a *billet doux*, and all the rest of its frothy nonsense. But she remained unresponsive to the sweet sentimentality of *Puccini*, and could not be consoled by the technical perfections of such a work as *Madam Butterfly*. With the rest of the audience, however, she would wait with vast amusement for Kate Pinkerton's appearance: an Italian artiste would stride across the stage, dressed as American and English women look in the eyes of Italians: a bad figure, unkindly revealed by a mannish

suit; a battered hat, without shape or design, just jammed on, and broad, flat-heeled boots, about size eight, in which the Italian girl walked with difficulty. This apparition always provoked a roar of derisive laughter, that turned the opera's element of tragedy into farce.

In addition to the religious inspiration, for which she went hungry in her daily life, Anne reaped from operatic music a more extensive knowledge of the human mind than her experience had yet afforded her. All that she knew of passion, or was to know for many years, she learned from opera. Her reactions at the Scala were very personal, but unorthodox. She was profoundly (and indeed her companions thought even comically) impressed by the simple morals of the opera tales, concerning such primitive matters as the unvarying reward of virtue and the punishment of vice.

One Saturday afternoon, as Anne stepped off the tram in the Piazza del Duomo, she was hailed by Mrs. Bamfield. It was the first time they had met since the strike, and the American woman was extremely cordial.

“We seem to be going the same way,” she said. “Like us to stick together?” Anne assented with a shy smile.

“Glad to have a chance to talk with you,” Mrs. Bamfield went on. “I have to get some candies here for a party tonight. Perhaps you'd help me . . .”

They turned into one of the most fashionable sweet and confectionery shops in Milan, not hitherto penetrated by Anne, where a bewildering variety of expensive sweet-meats were displayed on long counters.

“I have ten coming,” Mrs. Bamfield explained. “Now how many of these would you say . . .”

Anne felt foolish. She was no good at estimating the probable quantity of each confection likely to be consumed by the festive ten, and she was bad, too, about making a choice. *Marrons glacés* were the only sweetmeat she recognized. Mrs. Bamfield was tolerant.

“You shopping, too?” she asked as they left the shop.

“No, I was only going to the Cathedral,” Anne told her.

“Why, what’s on?” Mrs. Bamfield asked.

“Nothing. I was only going to look round inside.”

“Land sakes, haven’t you seen it yet?” Mrs. Bamfield was amazed.

“Oh, yes, of course. I’ve been in there hundreds of times. But I’m doing the details of the interior now with a good guidebook I’ve got. . . .”

“Land sakes,” exclaimed Mrs. Bamfield again. “I don’t like it all that much. Well, *it* can keep anyhow. . . .”

Anne agreed. They went on a shopping round. Mrs. Bamfield always chose the best place regardless of price. She spoke Italian badly, but with a sort of disdainful and ungrammatical fluency, and she seemed scarcely to see the assistants. She never asked about prices, simply choosing what she liked, and she carried nothing, even the smallest packet, but ordered everything to be sent.

“Like to have a cup of tea with me?” she asked, when she came to the end of her list.

“Oh, thanks,” said Anne, “I’d love it.”

“Where shall we go then? You choose.”

Anne’s knowledge of the teashops was very limited. She hesitated. “The Cooperative Stores,” she ventured at last. Mrs. Bamfield checked an exclamation of horror.

“It’s not a very exciting place,” she said gently. “What about the American teashop?” Anne did not know it.

"Well," Mrs. Bamfield cried, "it's time you did. It's the only place in Milan where you get a cup of real tea."

She conducted her there. The place had a very modest exterior, but inside it was packed with fashionable American and English women, chattering gaily. Smiles, nods, and whispers greeted Mrs. Bamfield's entrance. She was evidently a popular member of these colonies, and a personage among them. On every table there were neat packets of fudge, tied with gay ribbon, and a dish of salted almonds.

"Have some of these," invited Mrs. Bamfield, beginning to nibble the almonds, "they make you want your tea." Then, reading the menu, she asked:

"Like waffles?"

"What are waffles?" Anne asked. To her it sounded like part of a harness set.

Mrs. Bamfield considered her with amused perplexity.

"Well, I'll tell the world. . . . Land sakes, what do you do with yourself?"

When the waffles and honey were set before them, Mrs. Bamfield pursued:

"They brag such an awful lot about you . . ." Anne stared.

"Who? You — you don't mean Mr. Bamfield?"

"Oh, well, Henry was away, you know. But they're telling him! There was a bunch of fellows with us from the Paris office the other day and they never finished about you. You're a sort of heroine of the company, with European fame," she teased.

Anne blushed.

"I didn't do a thing," she protested. "It all went off so quietly. I'll tell you what it is, Mrs. Bamfield," she confided. "Italian girls are very badly trained for office work;

in fact I don't think they're trained at all. And perhaps I shine just because I'm compared with the women in our office. If I were in an office with American or English girls, no one would think anything of me, because we'd be all the same."

Mrs. Bamfield looked at her kindly. Anne's modesty was too genuine to be other than pleasing.

"Well," she said, "could you do anything to make that fellow of mine work a little less hard?" Anne had been leaving Bamfield behind her in the office every night now for several weeks.

"Does he stay late?" she asked in surprise.

"Oh, yes." Mrs. Bamfield had a troubled look. There was an expression in her eyes that Anne could not fathom, unless it was shame, but why should Mrs. Bamfield feel ashamed?

"I thought he just happened to be the last to leave," Anne said, "and followed out on our heels. There's nothing I can do about that. I always see the work of the day right through before closing time."

"Well, what's he doing?" persisted Mrs. Bamfield. "He's there now, you know. Went back after lunch, just as if it wasn't his free afternoon. We haven't been anywhere together for ages. Is it that he's doing everyone else's work besides his own?"

"No, it isn't quite that," said Anne slowly. With a flash of intuition she understood the position. Here was a woman beginning to be unhappy. The defections of a husband can be manifold and the lure of work to a man of Bamfield's type almost as potent as the lure of women to an inconstant mind. Mrs. Bamfield was staring at her anxiously, and she realized that the poor wife had begun to

entertain suspicions which were possibly wronging Bamfield. "Perhaps our meeting was providential," she thought.

"You know," she explained, leaning across the table, "Mr. Bamfield is a genius at his work. I would probably not have understood that myself if the manager of the London office had not said it to me when he was over. I'll tell you what he told me, Mrs. Bamfield, but please take it in confidence." Mrs. Bamfield nodded, her eyes intent on Anne's face; her tea forgotten. "He said your husband is one of the company's brightest lights, admitted that he envied him, and said he was bound to get to the very top. Now, although I'm his secretary, I honestly don't know what he's doing when he stays on after hours like that. It can't be anything at which I could help him, or he'd tell me to stay." She averted her eyes from the expression on the American woman's face, frowned at the decoration on the walls, and went on rapidly:

"They're stocktaking in the factory. I imagine it must surely be that. He's probably checking up on them. You know the company's business is divided off into about six departments and Mr. Bamfield has the work of each one of them at his fingertips. He never loses sight of detail, even when the biggest affairs are on, and he can do every single thing in the office better than anyone else can do it. He doesn't depend on any employee; that's where he scores." She paused and considered again, but still not looking at Mrs. Bamfield. "I have never known a priest," she went on, "so utterly devoted to his vocation, as he is devoted to the company's interests. Indeed there always seems to me something priestlike in his utter detachment from conflicting interests. I couldn't do it," she confessed with a smile. "I have to try and keep myself from watching

the clock when half-past five is coming round. I do my best while I'm there, but I'm always very glad to skip."

The eyes of the two met now across the table. Mrs. Bamfield's had so cleared, she looked an entirely different woman. All the tiny wrinkles of anxiety, the pinched look, and that something furtive and evasive in her expression had vanished.

"How are you getting on with the Veysey-Smiths?" she asked, changing the subject.

"Not well, I see," she added with a laugh, for Anne's sudden fall of countenance was more eloquent than words.

"I expect they're a bunch of stiffness," she went on. "I know them only slightly. I remember they gave a party here once to a lot of English people and they asked us, too. The maids they had in attendance weren't quite up to scratch, and the Smiths nearly got hysterics over it. Not only were they miserable themselves, but they wouldn't let any of us forget it and be happy. I never knew anything more ridiculous than to see that crowd of Anglo-Saxons sitting round trying to enjoy themselves. But I knew it would be clean, good food and a decent home, and that's why I told Henry to tell you about them."

"Thanks," said Anne. "I was very glad to go there for a start. It's all you say, but I'd be glad to change now. . . ."

"Why don't you try the American women's hostel?" asked Mrs. Bamfield. "You don't know where that is either, of course," she added tolerantly, as Anne looked blank. "Say, Miss Farrelly, why don't you nose round the city a bit, and get cute to things instead of spending so much time mooning round the cathedral?" She extracted a slip of paper and a pen from her bag and was about to write

something, when a sudden thought struck her. She looked round the restaurant attentively, and then beckoned to a woman at a distant table, who rose at once, and came forward. Middle-aged and pleasant looking, with lovely white hair, she greeted Mrs. Bamfield heartily.

"Dr. Carton," said Mrs. Bamfield, "do excuse me for disturbing you, but I want you to meet Miss Farrelly. She's Henry's secretary, over from Ireland, and she's not properly fixed up here yet. Have you got any room in your place?"

"Sure," said Dr. Carton eagerly. "Delighted to have you. There's a big room, with a bed in it for you. You won't mind sharing, dear, will you?"

Anne hesitated.

"You haven't a single room, I suppose?" she asked timidly. Dr. Carton shook her head regretfully. "There are only four single rooms there," she said, "and they seem to be in permanent occupation. I think the girls in them have settled down there for life. But none of the others really mind sharing: they're very nice girls, you know, mostly students."

"I've seen the rooms," Mrs. Bamfield concurred, "and they're really lovely."

"What are the terms?" Anne asked her.

"Five hundred lire a month. Would you think that too much?" Doctor Carton replied.

"Oh, no," said Anne. She was amazed at the cheapness. Why she was paying Mrs. Veysey-Smith a thousand lire a month. Instantly she made up her mind to chance it. "Will it be all right if I come this day week?"

"Yes, delighted. We'll give you a great welcome. How's Henry?" She was beaming down on Mrs. Bamfield.

“Working much too hard. I was just complaining about him to Miss Farrelly . . .”

“Oh, that’s the best way to have them,” Dr. Carton chuckled. “You’re one of the lucky ones . . .”

The hostel was in many ways a great contrast to the Veysey-Smiths’ perfectly appointed home. On the first evening Anne dined there, she looked with disfavour at the thick white soup plates, the black-handled knives, and the coarse table cloth. There were no flowers on the tables, and instead of the orderly and decorous ritual to which she had grown accustomed, meals were a scramble, accompanied by a din of insistent voices and rattling plates.

But the food was good and sufficient. Mrs. Bamfield, too, had spoken truly when she said the rooms were lovely. The accommodation was spread out over two flats, one above the other, connected by a spiral iron staircase. The rooms were large, airy, and furnished as bed sitting rooms. They had parquet floors and were panelled in pitch pine to about four feet above the floor. Over the panelling, the walls were distempered in pastel shades of yellow or green. There were oak bedsteads, sound, plain furniture and basket armchairs. The standard of cleanliness was rather high, and it was consistent.

The number of girls resident in the hostel varied from fifteen to twenty, the majority of whom were Italian, nearly all teachers in primary and secondary schools. There were also a few American girls, students of singing in Milan, and two Swiss girls, who were studying design and architecture.

Anne found she was to have one of the Swiss as her room companion—a tall, lanky girl from Basle, who

spoke Italian rather badly and understood no English. Anne settled down to talk French with her. Gabrielle was really a rough country lass, who was trying to acquire a little polish in Milan. She was flat chested, with large bony hands and surprisingly big feet. She was far more frightened of Anne than Anne was frightened of her. On their first evening together, she made two requests in a faint voice: "Will you call me Gaby?" and "Shall we give each other *tu*?" They adapted themselves immediately to a good working comradeship. They even agreed about the window, usually the rock on which room companions foundered. Unlike the Italian girls, Gabrielle did not believe that there was death in the night air.

Anne was soon on very friendly terms with the majority of the girls, with one or two of them she became close friends. Among them, her knowledge of the spoken language rapidly improved. Since Italian was always the medium of communication between them, she became as fluent as themselves. She learned to swear by *Bacchus*, and it was *perbacco si*, and *perbacco no!* She learned something even more intimately Italian than the speech, and that was the language of gesture. She acquired that motion of the index finger, meaning *Yes*, and that other negative motion that means *No*. She learned the sign with fingers and hand which means *Robbed*, or *There is danger of theft*, which explained certain commotions in shops hitherto inexplicable to her. She began to use those gestures signifying boredom, or the very climax of boredom, though her friends warned her they were vulgar. She helped out all her conversational powers, and especially anecdote, with the liberal use of gesture, precisely in the Italian manner.

She discovered a strange thing: flanked by such companions as Nera and Bianca, the *bella bionda* plague totally ceased. She began to flatter herself that on the streets of Milan she was already passing as an Italian, or at least as an Italianised foreigner, but Nera and Bianca gave her a different explanation. They told her she looked respectable when she was companioned.

"You hardly think yourselves chaperons," Anne jeered.

"No," they said seriously, "that's not the point. You don't need a chaperon, but you do need a companion. Anyone would do for that, even a toddling child gives you at once the appearance that is needful. If you want to have peace on the streets, go in pairs, or preferably in threes."

There were certain places in the city where they would not go, even in threes: one was the *Galleria*, that beautiful arcade of shops, greatly admired by Anne. Its terrazzo pavement was crowded with strollers from late afternoon, but among them Bianca and Nera would not go.

"You'll get pinched," they told her.

"Pinched!"

"Yes, the young men there pinch the girls as they pass them. That is the practice . . ."

Anne was confounded. Such diversions were unknown in Pallasgrange.

"What is the meaning of that?" she demanded.

"You are very simple," they told her impatiently. "The pinch leads to closer acquaintance if the girl is willing. If she doesn't happen to like it, she has to put up with it."

Anne was incredulous until she read in a Milanese paper a court case in which an American woman had summoned a man for pinching her in the *Galleria*. She had

been strolling along, her husband immediately behind her, admiring the lovely roof of the arcade, when she was annoyed by a pinch. She indignantly complained to her husband, who seized the offender. There was a scene terminated by the arrival of the police. The case was reported very jocosely at the expense of the "prudish" Americans. The magistrate said no doubt such practices were common too in Yellowstone Park; this was indignantly denied by the Americans. The case was dismissed, and the injured ones got nothing for their trouble except additional expense by being detained in Milan for a much longer period than they had intended to stay there. Anne, too, avoided the Galleria.

Anne was at first greatly surprised and then touched at Gabrielle's *gaucherie* and excessive timidity in all that concerned city life. Anne herself felt her identity so inseparable from that of Hannah Farrelly's niece in the little country town of Pallasgrange, she was always self-conscious of her inexperience and immaturity. Yet, when she went out with Gabrielle, she got the impression that she was a city girl taking a country cousin to see the sights.

Besides being a plain girl, Gaby dressed badly in cheap, ill-fitting clothes. She was terrified of the fashionable shops and was only with difficulty persuaded to enter them with Anne. Even then she walked on tiptoe, with a cringing and deprecatory air. She thought the teashops very suspect kind of places and was horrified at the notion of boldly going into one of them and ordering tea. Anne took her one afternoon to the American teashop, and was highly amused at Gaby's behaviour, which alternated between boisterous guffaws of a defiant sort of merriment, and

moods of glaring severity. She thought everything that was American or English almost demoralisingly fashionable and smart. No persuasions on Anne's part could put her at her ease.

Gaby confided to her that when she first came to Milan (only a few months before Anne had arrived at the hostel), her brother had accompanied her from Basle to see her installed. All had been already arranged by letter with the directress, but they could not find the place! The trams proved an insuperable problem, and they thought taking a carriage too extravagant a business. Even when they asked directions, they lost their way. They walked the streets *for six hours*, arriving at the hostel late in the evening, footsore, hungry, and exhausted. As the brother had to leave immediately to catch his train home, that is all he saw of Milan, poor fellow! Anne was shocked at the revelation of such incompetence.

But shops and streets and cafés — there, alas, was the sum of Anne's superiority. From the cultural point of view, it was Gaby who scored all the time. They both found this out early in their acquaintance. They were walking up the Via Dante one day, and when the cathedral spires swung fully into view, Anne murmured in the appreciative manner acquired from the Milanese:

“*Ecco la nostra Madonnina.*”

“I hope you don't like it,” said Gaby sourly.

“Like the cathedral? That doesn't express it. It's a wonder!”

“Oh, there I agree with you. Ever since I first saw it, I have not ceased to wonder how it could even have happened at all. . . .”

“It's beautiful,” said Anne indignantly. Decry her lovely

duomo. . . . She felt as injured as if she had built it herself.

"Beautiful!" Gaby stood stock still in the crowded street and raised her hands and eyes to heaven in a passionate gesture. "Oh, don't abuse that word. *Beauty!* My God! There is nothing good in that unfortunate cathedral, inside or outside. My poor little friend, don't you really know that?"

Anne looked sulky. They had reached the Piazza del Duomo. Gaby sank on to a seat and considered her with lively interest, as if she were a freak, or had been discovered to have more than the normal number of limbs.

"Is it possible you don't know that?" she said. "Is it possible you can be such a Philistine? Where did you come from? Is there no building in your country? Your opinion means that you have had no education, you know, none whatever! I marvel, I really marvel, that one so — how shall I put it? — so refined, so fine as you are, could be so essentially ignorant. Look," she went on earnestly. They were sitting gazing up at the thousands of glittering white spires, and Gaby made a vigorous gesture with both hands that seemed to reassemble them together for examination.

"When you first saw that, had you had the very slightest notion of even the elements of architectural design, or indeed any appreciation whatever of form and line, you would have been instinctively jarred. You would have had a sensation of pain and confusion. Don't you see how vulgar it is, how offensively ostentatious? It speaks of the self-glorification of man much more eloquently than it tells the praises of God. Its builders forgot their primary purpose. There is no intensity there, no prayerfulness, no

harmony. It is a sermon in decadence. Never say," she cautioned Anne, "never say in this country that you experienced any other reaction, or you will invite derision. You had better hide that ignorance of yours like a mortal sin...."

Anne was stung. "It's not as bad as that," she protested. "It's not as bad as you say. You can't see it here. It wasn't built in relation to this city that swarms round it now to cloak it. It was designed in relation to the flat and featureless plain of Lombardy, against which background its decorativeness is a most pleasing contrast. I have seen it from forty miles away, across the rice fields, and it is lovely and alluring then, with all its white fingers of stone raised up like hands uplifted in prayer on the horizon...."

Gaby shook her head. "When one has to go forty miles away from a thing before one dares to look at it.... I, too, have seen it from far away, and I agree it is more tolerable according as it recedes from view...." She suddenly buried her face in her hands and groaned. "Can't you really see how bad it is? Don't you know instinctively that the men who built it were not spiritual minded? I can't explain it to you, but it stares you in the face. Technically speaking, the chief mistake, of course, was to lavish such a wealth of pointed decoration on a foundation that is all flatness and no elevation. It's most discordant. The effect is merely like an iced cake; indeed, that's what it is, a design worthy of a pastry cook. Look, if you got a wedding cake like that, would you be displeased? Surely, yes, you would frown and say, what a horrible notion! How much more dreadful, then, when it's the temple of God! I do not go to church myself, but I'm a believer, after all, and I think I know what is due to the house of God, to the

'true fount and one essential principle of beauty' and 'the place where His glory dwelleth.'

Anne was crestfallen; she had a strong conviction that Gaby was right.

"I have found something in that cathedral anyhow," she persisted. "I have spent dozens of Sunday mornings there going over the detail with a guidebook, and it was wonderfully interesting."

Gaby shrugged. "Don't admit it to anyone else," she cautioned her. "One can study there a perfect confusion of styles and periods, but nothing praiseworthy. You would have spent your time more profitably in the company of a lunatic." Her simile pleased her, and she expanded it. "It reminds me strongly of a lunatic, that cathedral, in its disorder, the lack of sequence in its ideas, its persistence in deviating from the truth, its insane sort of logic, its very pathos. There might be an odd good point of detail, those bronze doors for example, like the occasional moment of lucidity even a lunatic enjoys, and which really make the total collapse more fearful by contrast. But, my God, the waste, the criminal waste of it all, to expend such a labour of detail on anything so utterly unworthy and banal. If only it were not so prominent; if one could get away from it sometimes. . . . I try not to see it. Come on."

They walked home through the park in silence. Anne was reflective. What *did* she know about architecture anyhow? What *could* she know? She had never read a textbook on the subject. No one had ever talked to her about it. This was the first notable edifice she had ever seen. Pallas-grange was only a huddle of ugly little shop fronts around a plain unpretentious church. All she could recollect of Mallingford was dreary ugliness, in a waste of suburban

roads, the only part of the city with which she had been familiar.

Her growing appreciation of Gaby's cultural superiority made her tolerant of her roommate's untidiness. It was impossible to give their sitting room a neat appearance while Gaby worked in it. The top of the chest of drawers was always an unsightly and dusty jumble of set squares, rulers, compasses, pencils, erasers, and sketch books. When she laboured at design, she sometimes used sheets of paper too large for her drawing board, and she was gradually ruining the surface of the only table in the room by jabbing drawing pins into it. She had the habit of cleaning up her drawings with stale bread, with the result that her half of the floor was always sprinkled with bread crumbs and the rubbings from her erasers. Hour after hour in the evening, she would work on industriously, wielding her pencil with little flourishes surprisingly graceful considering how large and bony were her hands; her face flushed with her efforts; her brows drawn together in frowning concentration.

One day, Anne asked Gaby to take her to the Brera picture gallery, but Gaby abruptly refused.

"I've been there," she said. "There's nothing in it but rubbish. It's a waste of time." Noting Anne's disappointed look, she went on. "There's only one picture in Milan, Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*. Have you seen it?"

"No."

"Let's go there, then. One cannot see that too often."

Accordingly, on Anne's next free afternoon, they went to Santa Maria della Grazia, the monastery which formerly belonged to the Dominicans, where the famous fresco is preserved. Anne was impressed by the extraordinary

quietude of this retreat, so secluded a corner that it might have been a thousand miles from Milan.

The picture itself made an ineffaceable impression. It is only the melancholy ghost of a masterpiece, yet it had been painted by a superman in art, who was also a great believer, in a mood of reverence so profound that it still breathes from the painting after nearly four and a half centuries.

The central head of the group, that of Christ, has almost disappeared; the features are gone, there is only a shadowy nimbus to denote the hair, but it still conveys something of the majesty that emanated from the original painting. It is slightly inclined, as though oppressed with weariness, its listening stillness in sharp contrast with the shock of movement running through the other figures that had suddenly been thrown into commotion. Judas cannot refrain from a movement of alarm to hear his secret thoughts given utterance and, taken by surprise, his miserable soul rises to the surface of his dark face; there is wounded love on the boyish countenance of John; Peter has leaped to his feet with all his old impetuosity, his rugged face full of indignation.

Anne had, of course, seen countless reproductions of this picture but now, confronted by the original, its pathos overpowered her. She stood there gazing, without speaking, her soul ploughed and riven by emotion, biting her lip, the tears smarting. "What is it?" she asked herself in a sort of anguish, "what is it makes it so supremely appealing? It must be the frustrated soul of the artist still lamenting from this mournful and wasted fresco."

Gaby's plain face, too, was transformed as she contemplated the painting. Her shining, happy eyes made her

look for the moment almost beautiful. She was silent for an unusually long time, but then she roused herself to instruct Anne, who ground her teeth in irritation.

"An experiment," she explained. "The damn fool; he very nearly pulled it off. Oils on a sort of plaster that crumbled immediately. He saw it vanish even in his lifetime. And it was he who said: *mortal beauty decays, but art endures*. Do you see that foul splash of colour there? A retouching. And these lines here? Each attempt at restoration is clumsier than the last. They have destroyed it. But look at that grouping, and the light! It should teach you the meaning of harmony, if anything could . . ."

The spell was irretrievably broken. Anne turned away. "I've seen enough," she said shortly. "Let's go." But she had gained more than she knew from that day's experience: she had henceforth a norm of judgment in art.

Life in the hostel was like that of a miniature commune. The girls were on intimate terms with one another, and shared every discovery they made. If one of them went to a new modiste, she would bring home the hat and exhibit it on a table in the salon for all to see. The others would cluster around it, linking arms and voicing their comments. If the hat was popularly judged a success, then they all rushed with an order to the same milliner, who was overwhelmed. The same happened with the shoemaker or the tailor. They took an intense interest in clothes and explored all the resources of Milan in order to be well dressed. Almost every girl in the hostel had her own special laundress and her own sewing maid.

The test of a laundress was to watch her at work. When Anne made enquiries, Nera led her to her particular

favourite, a poor woman living near the river. She used no soap, regarding this commodity as a great extravagance of doubtful merit. She steeped the clothes in cold water and tied over the washtub a rough cloth on which she spread the ashes from wood. It was this lye solution, percolating through the clothes, that did the trick. Next morning, any remaining stains were rubbed out on a flat stone at the edge of the river, and the clothes thoroughly rinsed in running water, then dried quickly on grass in the sunny air. The result was a dazzling whiteness. This poor woman then neatly darned all the clothes committed to her care before she ironed them. Her charges for this service seemed absurdly low to Anne, who presently began to feel that her clothes were hardly worthy of the care so diligently lavished on them. She was encouraged to give large orders to an embroiderer who made her beautiful linen underwear, trimmed with filet lace, also made by herself.

In the art of living, Anne found her Italian friends very entertaining. They took trivial matters most seriously and were easily excited. They criticised each other's attire with the greatest freedom; more than that, they explained each other's physical faults, not merely with candour, but in the public hearing, even shouting the details from one end of the dining room to the other. If one's total appearance happened to be passed unanimously by the hostel, one could feel fairly sure of being well turned out.

But the great topic among them, eclipsing all others in its absorbing interest, was love, courtship, and marriage. They discussed the most intimate details of this theme with a freedom and a relish that gave Anne gooseflesh. Every girl, with the exception of Anne and Gabrielle, had her *innamorato*. They could not understand how life could

be lived without such pleasing excitement. They thought it perhaps comprehensible in the case of Gaby, because she was very plain (poor Gaby admitted it), and very devoted to her art. But they could not understand it in Anne. She was younger than Gaby, dressed rather well, and she had (they told her) a face like a doll. Not to have an *innamorato* under such circumstances was simply freakish. They surmised that Anne had the mind of a disappointed, soured, and discontented old mees, and this before she was twenty! It was the strangest thing any of them had ever known. They discussed it in Anne's presence with their usual freedom. They decided she must have had a past and that she was too secretive about it: she should share her experiences with them for their common enlightenment.

There was one girl, Giuseppina, whom Anne particularly detested. She was an enormously fat creature, with great liquid brown eyes like a cow's. She had an *innamorato* named Armando, and each day at lunch she informed the whole dining room how the courtship was progressing. She would say in her smothered, luscious voice:

"Last night I wept coming home. I assure you, girls, that I wept. He said things that were too, too beautiful. I could not bear it."

"What did he say?" in a chorus of eager voices.

"He said: 'I am annoyed at those stars. They should be closer to me. Then I would seize a handful and weave a crown for your hair. They are the only sort of jewels you should wear' . . ."

"Oh, lovely," they all agreed. Anne alone contemplated the lovelorn damsel with scorn in her eyes.

"What else? What else?" they prompted Giuseppina.

"Then the tram came along and he stamped his foot at it. 'How I hate that No. 12,' he said."

"Why, dear?" I asked him.

"Because it takes you away from me."

"Oh," the others breathed in a pleased sigh.

"Let's have no more of it," cried Anne. "I never heard such sentimental rubbish. You're bemused, all of you. Let's have no more of it." Lunch was over and she walked out, leaving a black scowl on every face in the dining room.

"You are behaving badly," Gaby told her afterwards. "You must bear with them if you don't like it. The Italians are thus, and you won't change them. There is nothing to be done about it."

"I can't stand it," Anne told her. "Their conversation is disgusting at times. In my country we are reserved about such matters."

"Personally, I find it amusing," said Gaby, "especially when they explain to me why I haven't an *innamorato*. You'll make yourself very unpopular, I warn you. It could be unpleasant to have every girl in the place against you. You're in the minority and you won't succeed in making them different."

Anne tried to check her tendency to sneer, but events always seemed to confirm her cynicism. Emotional crises were frequent among the girls. One day, Giuseppina appeared at lunch, red-eyed and drawn-looking. She drooped over her plate. The others, evidently acquainted with her tragedy, implored her to eat, but she shook her head. Then the news was cautiously whispered to Anne that last evening Giuseppina had been walking home through the park with her adored Armando; it was so beautiful, they were strolling hand in hand like two happy children, when a

woman suddenly accosted them. She was obviously very near to having a baby, and she revealed herself as Armando's lawful wife. He fled through the shrubberies, leaving Giuseppina to bear the brunt of his wife's venomous and shrewish abuse.

None of the girls, and least of all Giuseppina, had a word of blame for Armando. “Poor fellow. Poor fellow.” They shook their heads. It was a great romance!

But Anne had no sympathy for anyone in the sordid story. She shrugged her shoulders and looked coldly at the limp Giuseppina.

Another day, it was Ada who was in trouble. She was always boasting about her admirer, an officer in a cavalry regiment and *nobile*. He used to sit in the salon on Sunday afternoons, and he was very decorative: well over six feet, even before he donned his high black riding boots with the shining spurs, he wore his uniform, the bright blue cloak swinging from his shoulders, with a splendid and negligent grace. But one day the alluring role of a lover fell from him with disconcerting suddenness. An order came for his transfer, and he took leave of Ada with cool abruptness. He told her harshly that their friendship should end, for he could never marry her. She was only a teacher and she had no money. He would have to find someone with money in order to keep up his position as cavalry officer, and there was also the barrier between them of unequal birth, which might prejudice his military career. Ada was prostrate after his departure. There was universal sympathy for her, and again no word of blame for the lover.

“I think all your men are *mascalzoni*,” was Anne's comment.

“But he couldn't do it, don't you see?” they explained

to her patiently. "He was right in what he said. The discipline of the army does not permit it. They could not marry."

"Well, couldn't he have thought of all that before he began ornamenting the salon?" Anne demanded.

The Italian girls could never follow this cold sort of logic.

"But he was in love," they told her. "You can't help yourself when you're in love. You are hard, Anne, terribly hard for one so young."

One day, this clash of ideas came to a head, not over a blighted heart, but over a book. It was a novel about a typist who had been seduced by her employer, who subsequently married her, and somewhat later they both found that they detested one another. This book had a tremendous vogue among the girls. They all read it, passing it from one to the other, and praising it extravagantly. They were discussing it one night at supper:

"Such beauty! The vocabulary and the style! I have never known anything like it. Perfect! What a genius! What a mind!"

Anne was silent, absorbed in dissecting a peach and engaged with her own thoughts.

"Have you read it?" Nera asked her.

"No," she said shortly.

"Give it to her next," Bianca implored. "You *must* read it, dear," she went on. "You cannot afford to miss it. It's the book of the century."

"I looked over it when Gaby had it in our room. I don't want to see it again, thank you. I couldn't read it."

"You mean the language is too difficult for you?"

"No such thing indeed! The book is just dirty and

obscene. I wouldn't read such trash. Life is too short."

"My God, listen to her!" they chorused, aghast at her views on their precious novel. "You don't know what you're saying, the most marvellous mind . . ."

"I can't help knowing the plot from hearing you talk about it," said Anne sourly. "When I glanced at it, I saw that the author certainly mouths a lot about his trollop. No doubt he describes lewdness accurately. If it gives you joy to read about it, all right. But don't be foisting that reading on me; my tastes don't lie that way."

Every girl in the room was up in arms. She looked round in amusement at the circle of angry eyes.

"You are ignorant," one of them told her heatedly. "That's why you can't understand the grandeur of that book."

"I agree with you," Anne retorted, "that the man has the gift of words and style. I saw that. But that does not make a readable book, when the theme is so foul and crawling that it stinks. . . ."

"Silence," they shouted. "You are most offensive, Anne. You hurt our patriotism and our great heritage. . . ."

"The great heritage of Italy, if you want to know it, is Catholicism," Anne said. "You all call yourselves Catholics but none of you practise; you neglect your real heritage so grossly that you aren't fit to talk about patriotism. . . ."

"Anne!" Dr. Carton intervened sharply in English. "You have no right to speak to them like that. . . ." Anne flushed at the reprimand, but it was too late to still the storm she had raised. There was a babel of angry voices.

"How dare you! We're better Catholics than you are. We know far more about it . . ."

"Oh, I know you have contempt for heresy; at least

you have that left, but everything else that belongs to you, you have flung aside. And then you dare to talk of patriotism . . ." Anne sneered.

Supper was over and Dr. Carton stood up with a stern gesture, intent on ending the quarrel. But no one seemed to see her, still less obey her by vacating the room. She walked out alone. Several girls were storming simultaneously at Anne and the two American boarders, only half comprehending, were listening to the uproar with a sort of bewildered amusement.

"Your rudeness is unbearable."

"We're not going to stand it from you!"

"Hear that!"

"No. No. We won't stand it!"

"We won't!"

"You will have to leave this place."

Nera, always Anne's particular friend, sided now with the others.

"We have treated you with nothing but courtesy since you came here, and in return you insult us and avoid us."

"Yes. Yes. You avoid us."

"Answer that."

"Answer that."

"I do avoid some of you sometimes," Anne admitted, "because there are times when I cannot endure your conversation. It's — it's dirty."

"Good God! Take that back, take that back!" Ada sprang to her feet, clashing the cutlery together in front of her, her dark face quite livid with anger. She was the most excitable among the girls. She pointed her finger dramatically. Bianca tried to drag her back into her seat and, not succeeding, she stood up too, with her arm around Ada's

shoulder. All the others seemed to be yelling together at Anne. "Leave her alone! Leave her alone," Bianca pleaded for the Irish girl. "She's a foreigner among us. She does not really know what she's saying. She does not understand the value of words."

"Keep quiet! Say no more!" It was Gaby who now threatened Anne with a menacing frown.

But Anne's temper too was thoroughly roused. "Not understand my words," she jeered. "*Perbacco*, but I do understand them. I have chosen them!"

Ada gave an inarticulate cry and snatched a knife from the table. Bianca and Nera struggled to take it from her and their chairs were knocked over. The three girls swayed together across the room, the others closing around them, shrieking. It was pandemonium.

Anne's cheeks were flaming, her heart was thumping, but she leaned back in her chair with exaggerated nonchalance. "They're going to kill me," she thought. "I'll be martyred, and all for the sake of a dirty book. What an insufficient cause!"

The two American girls extricated themselves from the confusion and one of them bent over Anne's chair as she passed:

"Say, kid, I don't know what you're up to, getting this bunch against you. But you'd better quit in a hurry like." They hastened out.

Anne sat on, gloomily pushing the stone of her peach around her plate. All the tables were vacant now, and the girls were clustered together like a swarm of bees at the end of the room. They had succeeded in disarming Ada, who was weeping with noisy hysteria.

"The poor thing! The poor thing!"

“Get her a cup of hot camomile, quick, it calms the nerves.”

“She’s had such a bad time, poor thing!”

“Who’s got sal volatile? It would be the best . . .”

“No, get her feet up.”

“It’s a shame to upset her like that. The poor thing.”

They were half carrying Ada through the door now, intent on getting her on to the couch in the salon.

Anne looked after them morosely, then sauntered out through the other door and went to her room. But after she went to bed that night, she cried for a long time in secret, carefully muffling her grief from Gaby.

Only Dr. Carton gave her a greeting next day. Even Gabrielle did not speak to her for a week. But some ten days later, the girls appeared to love her more dearly than before. She, however, bitterly regretted the quarrel, and in future resolved to curb her tongue. She had a genuine affection for her Italian friends, particularly Bianca and Nera, who had done so much for her in making her familiar with their country.

She was glad that her first holiday back in Ireland was now planned. It would give her an opportunity for a fresh start on her return.

Chapter Eight

AN ASSORTMENT of cars were parked in close proximity to the little green wooden gate of Nora Conway's semidetached residence in Terenure. This assembly of vehicles proclaimed to all the similar houses on both sides of the quiet road that one of her monthly tea parties was in progress. Today, the guests had been accommodated on the strip of lawn at the back of the house, for tea was to be served outdoors in honour of the unusual geniality of the September afternoon. The house was full of bustle, and the atmosphere among the group on the lawn was characteristic of such functions, anxious politeness and an unrest occasioned by the disjointed conversation that was being continually interrupted and scattered by the children's interjections. Anne, in her deck chair, lifted the tips of her shoes and pensively surveyed them.

Marriage had certainly improved her sister, Nora. The lanky girl of Pallasgrange days, with the pale, discontented face, had matured into a rounded matron, who showed no lack of poise and self-assurance. Nora's dark hair was rapidly greying, and her face was somewhat prematurely lined, but though the evidence of a worrying disposition remained on her countenance, the discontent had vanished from it. She was full of the kindest interest in her neighbours and, when she entertained them, she went to the greatest pains to provide excellent fare.

Now that Anne had £400 a year, an annual holiday in Ireland had become possible. In addition to the joy of escaping from Milan in August, she found refreshing the change in atmosphere. She had two worlds, one Italian, the other Irish, and they were etched in her mind as the sharpest contrast of experience.

She was seated between two little bodies from the other end of the road, one of them a widow, Mrs. O'Connor, and her sister, Miss Hanrahan, who lived with her. Anne studied them with interest. They were both talking together, telling her about Mrs. O'Connor's son, Frank, recently qualified as a doctor. His career at the university and at the hospital had apparently been filled with distinction.

"What's he going to do now," Nora broke in, "when his time at the hospital is completed?"

"It was completed, you know," his mother said, "a month ago."

"I suppose he'll be starting out for himself, then?" Nora pursued.

"As a matter of fact, he has bought a share in a practice," said the mother, speaking with a certain reluctance, while her sister, the elderly Miss Hanrahan, discreetly lowered her eyelashes.

"Oh, where?"

"In Dublin, my dear," said Mrs. O'Connor primly. Nora's politeness made her forbear asking further questions, but her curiosity was plain.

"As a matter of fact, as a matter of fact," said Mrs. O'Connor, speaking with difficulty, "he's gone to practice on the north side."

Her sister sighed in sympathy with this revelation.

"Oh, my goodness, did you hear that, Bob?"

"What?"

Bob was busily occupied in arranging tables in the centre of the group and he looked round abstractedly.

"Young Frank's gone to practice on the north side!"

"Heavens!"

Robert Conway, a civil servant, who had been born and reared on the south side of Dublin city, was plainly aghast at this news. Mrs. O'Connor raised her hands in an eloquent little gesture.

"He would do it. Boys, you know."

Head shakes gave her sympathetic response. Anne found it difficult to compose her face into the required expression of condolence. Fitful acquaintance with Dublin had not yet made her accustomed to the city's parochial rivalries, and especially the south side's devastating contempt for the north side. Bob Conway sat down to digest the news and was mopping his face. Was it the heat or the shock of the tidings? They all clearly considered that the young man under discussion had displayed unequalled heroism in going to work on the north side. They spoke of this region as though it were Siberia, a land of the utmost hardship and rigour.

"Tell them the rest," prompted Miss Hanrahan.

Little Mrs. O'Connor hesitated and looked around the circle of faces. She hesitated again.

"The latest I heard," she said slowly, "the latest I heard, is that he's engaged to a girl from the north side." The company exchanged startled looks. Robert Conway whistled impressively. Was this really going too far? Was it going beyond heroism and perilously near degradation? *A girl from the north side*, their eyes were expressive.

"Who is she?" asked Nora crisply.

"I don't know," said the mother sadly. "He's bringing her to see me next week. All I know is that she's from the north side." It was enough. It was too much.

A chatter of voices in the front garden made Nora spring up. The children were effusively welcoming someone.

"It sounds like Nan," remarked Nora, disappearing through the hall. She returned in a few moments, and in her wake there came billowing across the lawn an enormous elderly woman. She was magnificently and carefully dressed in the height of the prevailing fashion, but the total effect was irresistibly comical. She wore what the costumiers describe as an *ensemble*: a pink frock, elaborately flounced and frilled, but in which the ample frontage of her bosom and her generous girth seemed painfully straitened. Over the frock, she wore a black coat of thin material. A large hat, as flat as a dinner plate, was rakishly and precariously perched on the extreme side of her head, revealing a mass of untidy, greying hair that straggled from its bonds. From the back of this hat two ribbons fluttered. Her thick ankles, though clad in the thinnest of lace stockings, seemed unduly compressed by the straps of her buttoned shoes. She was extravagantly bedecked with a large pearl necklace that lay in five ropes on her expansive chest and competed for attention with a huge shell flower pinned in the lapel of her coat, pearl earrings, five rings, six or seven bangles of pearl and gold, and a platinum wrist-watch. The effect, if not exactly happy, was certainly stunning. Noreen and Robert Og, the Conways' two children, were joyfully skipping around her, plainly very favourably impressed. Nan Connolly was obviously popular with the household. She greeted Anne heartily:

“And how are you, my dear? That’s good, that’s good. Oh, dear!” She lowered herself with some effort into a deck chair, sighed, and proceeded to ram the papers clutched in her hand into a large, ill-used looking handbag that was already stuffed to bursting point with miscellaneous objects.

“I’m late,” she continued fussily. “I should have been here hours ago, but I’ve just come from a meeting of our local branch of the Juveniles’ Welfare League. It was an immensely long agenda, and though I was chairing the meeting, I just couldn’t push them through it. You know how some people *will* talk . . .”

Nan was a committee woman, always buried in minutes, resolutions, disputations. She was a spinster with an income that dispensed her from the necessity of earning anything. She lived alone in a little house like Nora’s at the end of the road, where she kept a menagerie of stray cats and obese dogs.

The children, absorbed in her efforts to cram the papers into the bag and force the clasp to shut, shouldered her closely.

“We have cheese cakes for tea,” confided Robert Og. He was an elfin little fellow of three, with dark hair and violet eyes, resembling neither of his parents in any particular. His sister, a year older, was fair and sturdy, with a commonplace little face reminiscent of her father’s. The two children made a strange contrast as they leaned against Nan Connolly’s chair.

“Nan, did you hear about young Frank?” began Nora excitedly, “his mother was just telling us . . .” But she interrupted herself to spring up again and give an effusive welcome to two middle-aged visitors, colleagues of Bob

in the Civil Service. They were bachelors, with the same dry manner and the same desiccated skin. They sat down and immediately plunged into a discussion with Bob on some new rule about to be enforced in the office.

Nan turned to Robert Og:

"Cheese cakes, did you say?"

"Yes, and honey," supplemented Noreen. "And we're beginning on the new apple jelly today, as the old is all gone."

"My goodness," Nan Connolly laughed heartily with a boisterous amusement that pleased the children. "What a feast we'll have, and what an awful pity I didn't bring Bran and Chappie. I haven't been home since eleven this morning and dogs get very hungry."

"Oh, let me go for them," pleaded Noreen, thoroughly roused by this tragedy of canine hunger.

"Oh, yes, let me go," repeated Robert Og, who was Noreen's echo.

"Would they ever have the sense to do it?" Nan appealed to Nora.

"Oh, yes, of course," Nora turned to the children. "Take Robert Og's hand," she instructed Noreen, "and keep on the pavement all the time. Never step on the road. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, Mummy," the children murmured.

"You'll find their leads hanging up in the house that they're shut into," said Nan, "and here's the key of the garden gate. Now, go slowly and do all carefully, my doties. Bolt the door of the shed and lock the garden gate behind you again."

The children hurried off, their faces full of importance. Nan leaned back in her chair with a sigh.

"They're darlings, Nora, so simple and biddable. How do you manage it?"

But Nora was off at a tangent.

"Miss Hanrahan," she declared impressively, to the meekest of her guests. "All my strawberry jam is a failure this year, and yours was marvellous. Will you tell me the secret?"

"Just add red currant juice," said little Miss Hanrahan with an air of finality.

"But I *did*," said Nora tragically. "And still it wouldn't jell."

"Well, it all depends on the proportions," pronounced the expert. "You must show me the recipe you followed."

"Come in with me now, and I'll show you both the recipe and the jam," said Nora.

The women moved into the house in a body, absorbed in the jam problem, except Anne, who smiled a negative to her sister's invitation.

Immediately Bob turned to Anne:

"Is Italy on for war?" he asked her eagerly.

"I don't know," said Anne. "I have no information except what you read in the papers."

Bob appealed to his friends:

"Isn't she dreadfully secretive? She can never be made to open her mouth about Italy, and she's out there three years!"

"You might tell us, Miss Farrelly," one of the others appealed.

"I don't know," Anne repeated doggedly.

Her brother-in-law sighed, and she contemplated him with a kindly smile. When she had first met him a year ago, on her return to Ireland, it had been with a pang of

dismay. He was such a little thin man, rapidly going bald, and peering mildly through glasses; his appearance had no claim to distinction. She had been hearing about him for a long time before that; the marriage had taken place when she was in Mallingford, a year before Aunt Hannah's death. Primed by Nora's gushing letters, she had expected a far more heroic figure. At first, she had barely tolerated him as a poor Dickens quite devoid of address or personality, but maturity was giving her a new insight into human relationships, and closer acquaintance with the Conways had given her a better appreciation of Bob. He was a sincere, good fellow, with no brilliance perhaps, but with no baseness either, a devoted husband and father, always equitable and reliable.

Her sister had been very happy since she married him, and she owed that happiness to Bob. He was an ineffective sort of fellow, but he willingly submitted to be pushed by Nora. He appeared to have no native shrewdness, but then she was shrewd enough for two. He was calm and optimistic in situations where she was excitable and apprehensive. Nora tended to spoil their children, because she alternated between excessive tenderness and almost harsh repression, while Bob was consistently kind in his ruling. There were times when the interplay between the characters of husband and wife became fascinating to the observer, but its full meaning only gradually dawned on Anne. She learned from Nora and Bob the meaning of a happy marriage; a reciprocity divinely ordained, that which one partner lacks being found in the other, so that the pair between them merge into something like a complete entity with which to work out their destiny. It was a miraculous affair: either of these would be at once de-

feated by the world if they stood alone, but each took something from the other which fortified them and made them impregnable.

Pondering this, Anne had long ago become tolerant of Nora's matronly smugness. Kindly thoughts now spurred her to rise to Bob's demands. He professed an idealistic devotion to Anne, affected literary and linguistic leanings in her company, and was always trying to draw her out in order to impress his friends.

She indulged him now:

"My brother-in-law cannot be persuaded," she told them, "that I know nothing about Italy's foreign policy, and he still insists every day that I should elucidate the papers for him."

"Well, as you're so long abroad," Andrew Geraghty told her, "you should have plenty to tell us about your impressions."

Anne ignored the remark.

"When I was on my way home," she told them, "I met an old man in the train between Basle and Paris. He was an Irishman, who seemed widely experienced both in men and travel, as well as in books. We got into conversation and he gave me certain advice that I have never forgotten."

"Oh, what was it?" the three men were interested.

"He told me to hand in my gun," said Anne with a laugh. Her listeners looked perplexed.

"That is the phrase he used," she explained. "He told me that the less I talked about Italy on my return home, the better. He went on to warn me against telling anyone at home that the Italians are more efficient, more cultured, more praiseworthy, because the theme of race inferiority is one that every Irishman detests. He advised

me to keep my foreign experience a dark secret. The way he explained the atmosphere in Ireland was by saying, hand in your gun; make an unconditional resurrender to Irish standards if you're to be happy in the homeland. Mother Ireland is a queer old cynic and she won't stand any *braggadoccio* from her children. Anyhow, that wise old man did make me understand the vulgarity, the blatant and offensive vulgarity, of returning to one's native country and belittling it."

"Who was he?" Michael Shanahan, the third civil servant in her audience, asked her curiously.

"I don't know. When we reached Paris, I went off to supervise the transfer of my luggage, and I never saw him again."

"You took him too seriously," Bob grumbled. "I suppose that's why information about Italy has to be dragged out of you."

"No. My observation since I came back absolutely confirmed all his advice. I have heard many a returned traveller since then making himself a public nuisance with a ghastly affectation of foreign mannerisms, and a persistent confounding of the English language, two of the most sickening symptoms of the modern craze of tourism. I really think it's cheaper we're getting the more we go abroad, more confused about our own standards, and more uncertain about the worth of our traditions."

"Oh, dear," sighed Andrew Geraghty dolefully, "and I was thinking of going to Genoa for my holidays!"

"Go, by all means," laughed Anne, "but don't try to reform the whole country on Italian lines when you get back. When you meet the cold blast of Dun Laoghaire again, *hand in your gun!*"

"You really do think Italy worth seeing?" persisted Geraghty.

Anne looked at him helplessly, at a loss for words.

"Why not Venice?" asked Bob, delighted at the happy turn of the conversation.

"I stood in Venice, on the Bridge of Sighs;

A palace and a prison on each hand. . . .

Tell us about Venice, Anne."

She smiled at him indulgently. He was a trial when he broke out into Byronic metre, as was his frequent habit when he addressed her. She was saved by Geraghty, who was intent on explaining why Venice did not suit him. Nora was bringing back her friends, and the women's voices preceded them:

"It's only one and eleven a yard, and if you sew the stripes together with a fancy stitch, it makes the loveliest bedspread. . . ." Nan Connolly sank into her chair again, fanning herself with an Annual Report extracted from her bag. Immediately the children came running through the hall with the dogs.

"Here they are for you, Nan," they shouted. "Here they are!"

Bran and Chappie, Scottish cairns, frisked forward and sprang on their mistress' knees, giving a furious and shrill barking of pleasure that was ear-splitting. Nan hugged them to her ample bosom, with an outburst of endearing terms.

"How are ye, my dories? How are ye at all? Aren't I the bad woman to leave ye locked up all this blessed day? Are ye starved, are ye?"

"Go and tell Lizzie to bring tea," Nora told her small daughter, who promptly disappeared again. Presently Bob

and his two children, with spasmodic help from his colleagues, were assisting the little maid to carry the trays laden with a rich variety of sandwiches and cakes. Nan then confessed that she was absolutely exhausted from that dreadful committee meeting and fainting for tea. But before she would accept a mouthful, Lizzie had to be despatched into the house for special saucers and more milk for the dogs, who were meanwhile regaled with dry biscuits.

"Bran had asthma last week," his mistress told the company. "I had to keep him in my own room and I didn't sleep a wink with him, coughing the whole night long. He just coughed and coughed and coughed. I had to take him to the vet in the end and, funnily enough, it was a tonic he ordered him, instead of something for the chest. Wasn't that queer? But he's such a big man in his profession that I didn't dare to question it. . . ."

The men suffered this stoically, devoting themselves to the good refreshment provided. The dogs, now too replete even to bark, nosed quietly in the corners of the garden. Bob had ceased to bustle around the guests or mop his brow, and was enjoying his tea. The children, seated on a rug, had a plate of assorted sandwiches between them, which they were rapidly demolishing. They smiled up happily at their mother, who was gazing at them with pride.

Anne had never revisited Pallasgrange since she left it for Mallingford. The home had been sold up some months after Aunt Hannah's death. Her second sister, Julia, had married a doctor in the south of Ireland a year ago. Anne's Irish holiday consisted chiefly in subsiding very contentedly into Nora's placid domestic interior in this

reputable Dublin suburb. With Terenure for a restful background, the other scene of Anne's holiday diversion and the place where she discovered real relaxation for body and mind, was Leamore, the Ryans' home in County Meath.

The family were distantly related to Bob Conway, who had introduced Anne to Patricia Ryan: a small slight girl, fair, with indeterminate features and a cold expression. She conveyed a look of prettiness chiefly because she was faultlessly groomed. Her face was skilfully enamelled; her eyebrows were a thinly pencilled line; her mouth a splash of cardinal red; her hair elaborately waved and curled. She wore her nails very long, very pointed, and either gilded or silvered; and she usually held between her fingers a half-smoked cigarette in an amber holder nearly twelve inches long. From their first meeting, Patricia manifested a great liking for Anne's society, and Anne found the girl amusing enough to be indulged.

Patricia had only one enthusiasm in life: horses. She was exceedingly knowledgeable on this subject, and she brought to it a grave earnestness and a single-minded devotion. It was from her Anne learned with wonder with what amplitude horses can apparently fill a life. To Patricia, there were only a few real dates in the year: the meets of the hunt, the August Horse Show, and certain race meetings. The rest of the year could be agreeably spent in preparing for these dates, and thinking and talking about them.

When Patricia discovered that Anne could not ride, her look of mingled horror and despair sent Anne into peals of laughter. According to Patricia, not to ride was not to live; fullness of being could be attained only on

horseback; and not to ride in Ireland, of all places in the world, was the most subtle form of treason to the motherland. With a sort of desperate earnestness, she sought to convert Anne to the horse, and lightly, Anne allowed herself to be persuaded. Apart from any other consideration, she needed a good deal of exercise in the open air to counterbalance her long hours of sedentary labour, and riding was as good a form of exercise as any other, if not the best.

Guided by the anxiously determined Patricia, Anne was thus drawn into the equine world. She learned first how to sit astride a horse as it walked sedately round and round a small paddock. Then she learned how to sit correctly erect, without showing triangles of daylight between her knees and the saddle; how to keep her hands down, with the reins flowing smoothly between her fingers; how to adapt herself to the motion of the horse's trot with that rhythmic action known as the double shuffle; she learned the rocking motion that properly accompanies the horse's gallop and, finally, with some trepidation, she approached the difficult art of jumping.

Patricia ran a riding school in Leamore with the help of her brother, Eric. He was an honest fellow with a snub nose and freckles, and his mind, like his sister's, was unconfused by any other idea save horses.

Anne now spent hours contentedly enough, and sometimes whole days, in the company of people who talked about nothing but horses, and who rejected with finality any other topic of conversation: fillies and brood mares and cobs and ponies, and the pace of every single horse at the last point-to-point. Eric seemed to have only one serious anxiety in his life, and that was lest he should gain

weight before he rode in the point-to-point. He told her in the strictest confidence that he had an infallible recipe for rapid slimming: it was to strip naked and sit buried up to the chin in a manure pit, getting the stable men to ram it in well over the shoulders and under the chin, then sweat in this for as long as one can endure it, yell for someone to prepare a hot bath in the house, make a run for it, stay in the bath until the water cooled, then lie down for a while. One rose up the lighter by several pounds.

With the Ryans, Anne penetrated the homes of several racing owners, trainers, and hunting enthusiasts in the counties of Dublin, Kildare, and Meath. She received a general impression that horsy people favour, in their furnishing schemes, horsehair suites (probably in their determination never to leave the horse out of it), hideous dark colours, tarnished brasses, and a prevalence of dust and frowsy disorder. The yards of these establishments were usually immaculate with fresh paint, gleaming whitewash, and well-swept stable floors, as though the yardman invariably did his job better than the mistress of the house did hers. Nevertheless, Anne liked her new friends for their lightheartedness, their ready hospitality, their optimistic vision of life, and their easy friendliness. On closer acquaintance, they formed a wonderful fraternity, sporting in every sense, willing to go to any length in charity, determined not to let each other down. Second to the horse, badinage was the principal key to their conversation.

Leamore, the Ryans' homestead, was a drab, grey, two-storeyed house, quite devoid of architectural pretensions. Both the whole house and the seventy odd acres of land surrounding it were completely given up to the dominion

of the horse. It was an absolute surrender, without reserve, of house and land to one purpose only.

The entrance gates, the most impressive feature of the estate, were of handsome wrought iron. But once the gates were passed, the impression became steadily less pleasing. The land within consisted of flat, green fields, divided off by low ditches topped with hedges of quick. There were no trees, but every variety of jump of varying height and description had been constructed in the fields: a hedge jump, a ditch and water jump, double jumps, and gate jumps, all carefully prepared and graded for the instruction of novices in the management of the horse.

Several people had been at pains to explain to Anne that the Ryans were rich. They had always made money out of horses. The parents had been very lucky with them. Moreover, the elderly couple knew a more difficult secret than the mere making of money; they knew how not to spend it. So that Eric and Patricia were starting out on life with the brightest prospects. It was not financial need that had induced them to open their house as a riding school, but the desire for an active life and for plenty of company in the home.

A tiny garden, resembling the merest allotment plot, ran parallel with the stables. It was a little strip of ground jealously surrendered from the chief purpose of the land, as though the space of every cabbage had been begrudgingly measured. This vegetable plot, the yard and out-buildings, were separated from the house by a gravelled drive. On the other three sides, the fields ran right up to the house, and were divided from it only by a narrow path and a paling. Anne was amazed at the complete absence of flowers, or decorative shrubs of any description. She

found it difficult to imagine how the Ryans' forebears had resisted the temptation to plant even a solitary daffodil bulb, or a couple of yards of ornamental hedge. Evidently the same singlemindedness had run in the family for generations. The stark nakedness of the place was almost a mystery.

The yard was a great concreted enclosure, surrounded on two sides by some twenty horse boxes, on the third side by a wall and a gate leading to the aforesaid vegetable plot, and on the fourth side, by saddle rooms and grain lofts. Both Eric and Patricia took an intense interest in the yard, which shone with fresh paint and whitewash, and was kept thoroughly swept. In the saddle rooms, all the leather and silver gleamed. With pardonable pride, they led visitors to the yard and kept them there. They saw no sense in showing people over the house, which was merely a house.

The interior of this dwelling that they affected to despise was marked by untidy confusion, an entire lack of taste or elegance, tarnished silver and dusty carpets. The walls of the staircase were covered with hard-used polo clubs, belonging to an uncle who had once lived there and who had been a noted polo player. There were no bookcases, or bookshelves, in the entire house, and during the several periods she spent there, Anne discovered only one book, a large volume entitled, *Saddle-up!* On her visits to Leamore, Anne at first had felt absolutely checkmated by the absence of books. When Patricia led her through the house, disdainfully, as befitting the tour of a mere house, she kept a sharp lookout, but failed to see a second book. Finally, she ventured to ask Patricia, who answered with surprise, "No. What would we want books for?" In an

interior so completely devoid of printed matter (the daily paper rarely made its way into it), the single book was in great demand. The guests at the riding school were perpetually snatching *Saddle-up!* from one another, or mildly squabbling as to whose turn it was to have it.

Skirts were not approved of in Leamore, and to discard them seemed to be the unwritten rule. Mrs. Ryan, her daughter, and their pupils appeared in jodphurs at breakfast and lived in them for the rest of the day, not even changing after supper. Anne never saw Mrs. Ryan in any other kind of attire, and could not imagine what she looked like in skirts. She was a little woman, smaller in stature than her daughter, slim and active in a bony and angular way, with a weather-bitten jolly face, a pair of twinkling eyes, and short, bobbed grey hair. Though in her sixties, she strenuously did her share in the work of the riding school. She took pupils out on their daily rides, supervised the jumping exercises, and helped to groom and fodder the horses. She professed the greatest admiration for her son and daughter, and was always praising their enterprise.

On Anne's first visit to Leamore, Bob drove her down in his battered Morris, leaving her at the gate. The hall door stood invitingly open and a babel of talk and laughter floated out to her, as she approached. There was a great fire of logs burning in the huge grate in the lounge hall, and a group stood around it, with glasses in their hands, drinking various beverages ranging in potency from ginger beer to brandy. The Hicksons, racing owners and friends of Eric, whom Anne had already met, were among the group and they hailed her with a show of pleasure:

“Miss Farrelly, wherever did you spring from?”

"Why weren't you at the hunt with us today?" Anne, who was learning the susceptibilities of horsey people, forebore to mention that she had not known it was the day of the meet. Introductions followed. She was presented to the three pupils of the riding school, in addition to the Hicksons' party. One of these pupils was a plain girl with a wide nose, a wide mouth and coarse, hay-coloured hair, cut very short. The second was a small fat man, with the hurt, resentful look on his face often acquired by the very fat. His name was Johnson and he looked like what he was, a businessman. His liver was out of order and he was taking a riding holiday on his doctor's recommendation; also because he foolishly imagined that three weeks of violent exercise would make up for forty-nine weeks without any exercise. The third pupil was a Mrs. Obdam of uncertain age, with a face marred by fatigue and discontent.

Mrs. Hickson, her hands in her pockets and her toes extended toward the blazing fire, was relating the disappointments of their day. Her white stock and all one side of her large, good-natured face were profusely splashed with mud, of which she seemed serenely unconscious.

"We only sighted a vixen the whole day," she explained. "The hounds did nothing but raise false scents. We were just splashing round and round and round without result. The fields were absolutely bogged. Awful. And somewhere in the middle of it, the rain got so heavy that we were absolutely blinded as well as drenched to the skin." Her husband dropped on to the couch beside her and agreed that they had had a fearful day.

"I changed the minute I got here," he said. "You're foolish not to do the same, Essie. There's plenty of spares upstairs." As he spoke, he anxiously felt his wife's knees

to ascertain how damp she was. Anne, who was standing at the other side of the fireplace, was suddenly touched by that gesture; inexplicably, she remembered it long after she had forgotten every other detail of the day.

When she had accepted a glass of sherry from Patricia, Mrs. Ryan took her in charge and led her to her room. The frowsiness of the house reached its peak point in the bathroom, which was frankly dirty. Around the door-handle was a black greasiness that looked like the accumulation of many years. The towels were a bad colour and sodden. Anne hurried through her toilet with a resigned grimace.

The Hicksons and their friends were gone when she returned to the hall. None of the women changed for supper, and among so many riding breeches and jodphurs, she felt her skirt an embarrassment. Supper was a scratch meal, and the plain fare was roughly served, but the guests fell on it with an amazingly good appetite. About a dozen cats appeared in the wake of the food; they were disconcertingly tame and made a kind of charge at the diners, springing with agility from the shoulders of one to the shoulders of the next. The Ryans appeared not to notice anything unusual. Apparently this was the normal accompaniment to their meals. Anne happened to dislike cats and she glanced round at them apprehensively; later, when she felt the back of her neck gripped by the claws of a great, foxy tomcat, she could not repress a cry of alarm and disgust. The conversation was being carried out in such loud and animated tones, no one noticed her predicament, not even Patricia, whose head was bent in close attention to some story that Mr. Johnson was telling her. When the cat got tired of his unresponsive lodgement, he

sprang on to the shoulders of Eric, who promptly passed him up some titbits from his plate. According as Mrs. Ryan served out the food, she put the empty dishes and plates on the floor for the cats to lick.

The horses, of course, were being discussed with much animation, the Ryans making particular and exhaustive enquiries about the performance of their mounts in the hunt. Mrs. Obdam had ridden a pony named Billy and she explained to Pat in great detail exactly how Billy had behaved at every single type of jump. They were loud and vehement in their united scorn and condemnation of some woman rider, whose horse had refused a gate, and who had tamely accepted this defeat, retraced her course, and followed up the hunt by a devious route. Everyone at the table agreed emphatically that she was no sport, would never make a sport, and had ruined a promising horse by her pusillanimity. Mr. Johnson was not so pleased with the chestnut he had ridden; he said in his habitually aggrieved voice that the brute jerked his head at the jumps in the most annoying way and had almost unseated him several times. Patricia told him with some abruptness that it was not the horse's fault, but his own, because he still had the habit of pulling as he went over, despite the fact that he was always being told about it. Mr. Johnson lapsed into an injured silence, looking displeased and unconvinced.

When supper was finished, everyone made a rush for the stables to help water and fodder the horses for the night. The Ryans employed only one stable boy and he grinned with relief when they came out. Anne joined in the work, pushing barrow loads of hay and straw from the ricks that were most inconveniently distant from the

yard, spreading clean bedding in the stables that had been swept, giving a generous forkful of hay to each horse and afterwards a bucket of water. She pumped seemingly endless buckets of water from the stiff and creaking yard pump. The unwonted severity of the exercise made her face crimson and her forehead damp, and as she toiled, she began to understand the necessity of not wearing a skirt. When they got back to the hall, the oil lamps were lighted and card tables set out in readiness. But Anne declined bridge, and, at Mrs. Ryan's first suggestion of bed, she took herself off.

The next day was memorably enjoyable, typical of many such Sundays spent at Leamore during holidays in Ireland. There was a tap at her door in the morning before she was properly awake, and she heard Mrs. Ryan's voice:

"We're trying to make the eight o'clock Mass in Graigue. Are you on?"

"Oh, yes, thank you. I'll come."

"We have to leave in twenty minutes . . ."

"I'll be ready."

The sun was shining on her bedroom wall in a great golden square of light, and Anne, hastening to dress, marvelled how she could have slept so long on such a radiant morning. Small birds were chirping around the house and yard buildings, and the fields shone vividly green. The world outside seemed full of pastoral poetry, and gladness put wings to her feet as she ran downstairs to where the others were waiting.

They drove three miles to the little church: a poor, bare structure, with a sanctuary crudely and primitively adorned. The sunshine poured down on the altar and pricked out in points of light the gold embroidery on the

priest's vestments. The irrational happiness to which Anne had opened her eyes seemed to intensify.

She brought to breakfast the ravenous appetite characteristic of the Leamore household. Afterwards, they all set off to ride. Anne was given Billy, a harmless sort of pony. Two by two, sedately, they rode through the passage out of the yard: Anne and Eric leading, then Patricia and Mr. Johnson, still puffing from the exertions of mounting, followed by Mrs. Obdam and Mrs. Ryan, with the plain girl, Marjorie, bringing up the rear. On the avenue, the horses broke into a trot. Eric was appraising Anne's seat.

"Quite good," he pronounced. "You have none of that fatal triangle of daylight. Just mark how Mrs. Obdam cultivates it; she had us filled with despair."

They left the tarred highway almost at once and turned into a soft byroad with wide grass margins, where they could gallop the horses for nearly a three-mile stretch. The colour deepened in Anne's cheeks as Billy's pace intensified:

"Scream and he'll love it," Mrs. Ryan yelled to her as her horse drew abreast. "The beginners always scream when Billy begins to gallop and he simply adores it!" Anne crouched down over the pony, striving to slip into the easy, rocking position she had been taught to adopt for a gallop. The horses were all drawing into line, and the gallop was becoming a race. Eric's horse, Demon, forged ahead, tossing his black mane, amid a chorus of joyous shouts and laughter. The riders had the whole shining world to themselves.

At the end of the three-mile gallop, Eric led the way home through the flat fields. The sky clouded and a heavy shower fell. The riders made light of it. Their thick whip-

cord coats were rainproof. Anne was glad of the cold, stinging drops on her heated face, but presently she heard Eric burst into uproarious laughter on catching sight of his sister.

"Pat, for Heaven's sake, wipe that paint off. You look like a clown."

All the others laughed at his brutal brotherly candour and looked round to see Pat. The rain had washed the make-up down her cheeks in streaks of black, blue, and scarlet. Anne felt mortified on her behalf. But Patricia herself was not a whit abashed. She wiped her face gingerly with a handkerchief, remarking unconcernedly:

"Who would ever have expected such rain?"

As they turned into the yard, the downpour ceased, having but added to the freshness of the morning. The gong sounded for dinner as they were dismounting. Again they brought to the table appetites that knew no criticism. Afterwards they thankfully lounged for a couple of hours around the log fire in the hall, until Marjorie, who had been restlessly roaming about, slipped in and reminded Eric that he had promised her some tuition in jumping. All the others, except Mrs. Ryan, agreed to accompany the pair.

They went to the yard and assisted each other with the saddling. Mr. Johnson brought an apple for his mount, a chestnut named Prince. The horse, who was being bridled, got into difficulties between the bit and the apple, and lost the apple, which rolled across the yard. Prince plunged to recover it, butting them all aside with his head. They parted out of the horse's way with shouts of laughter, watching him until he had retrieved the apple from a corner. Prince was the first favourite in the yard. He was

a three-year-old and had been on his way to win at races when he developed a whistle. He now had a stopper inserted in his windpipe, to overcome the disability. Even thus handicapped, he sometimes ran in races but never succeeded in securing more than third place. Eric and Pat credited him with an extraordinary degree of intelligence and a highly developed sense of humour. He showed that he knew clearly all the routine of the riding school. If four saddles were left in different corners of the yard, Prince would spy out his own, walk to it and stand beside it until it was put on him. When a girl novice was to ride him, Prince would walk to the mounting block, where he knew she would have to mount; but when an expert such as Eric took his bridle, Prince straightaway began to walk from the yard, ignoring the block. He was a horse that loved admiration and applause. When the group of riders from the school had to pass through the neighbouring village, they usually dropped into a walk, and the people stood about to stare at them. This was Prince's hour: he immediately developed a swagger, and would proudly sway his hindquarters in a most comical fashion for the benefit of the bystanders.

Eric now led the party through the fields to a small ridge running along by a ditch and forming a low, simple jump. They cantered their horses in a wide circle to take the jump in turn, like a difficult sort of *Follow-my-leader*, Eric being the leader. It was Anne's first jump and her heart beat nervously. She happened to be behind Eric and decided to take it. Billy gathered himself together and rose without hesitation. “Bend,” shrieked Marjorie behind her. Anne strove to keep her balance, but lifted her hands in a nervous jerk at the reins. The saddle seemed to fly

sideways from under her and she toppled to the ground, striving as she fell to kick her feet free from the stirrups. Marjorie took the jump immediately behind her, uttering shrill screams of alarm. Anne picked herself up at once, surprised to find she was not the least hurt, not even shaken. Billy stood stock still and looked round with a mildly reproachful eye that sent her into a sudden paroxysm of laughter.

Patricia and Eric galloped back from the other side of the field:

"Hurt?"

"Not at all!"

She swung herself back into the saddle, crimson with vexation.

"You shouldn't have tried to jump without a little coaching," Patricia reproved her. Eric reined in to give her solemn instruction:

"Try again. It's the only way to learn, you know. Look here now. Grip the horse with your knees and hold the reins lightly, so . . . Rest your hands if you like on the saddle in front. But on no account lift your hands, or jerk at the reins when he rises. Bend toward his head, so as to go with the motion of the horse and not resist it. I thought Marjorie was the novice, but it's you. Best go last and watch the rest of us. Ready? Off!"

The riders circled the field again at a smart trot. The jump looked foolishly small from a distance; why the little ridge was only a few feet high. Yet, when Anne was going over it, she thought it a fantastic height. She clenched her hands on the reins; really she must not disgrace herself by falling off a second time, but her heart was thudding disagreeably. There was no time to think out a detailed

correction of her position; the horses seemed to be round the field in a twinkling. She saw Eric's untidy mop rise up as Demon sprang effortlessly over, then Pat's green beret, Mrs. Obdam's bowler hat, Mr. Johnson's sleek black head, followed by Marjorie's felt hat. She did not urge Billy; she let him take the jump in his own fashion, biting her lip to keep her hands from jerking up, and striving to keep on the saddle. They were over.

"Bravo!" Eric shouted. "Again, let's do it six times, till you children get confidence!" Swiftly they circled the field and the six horses took the jump in quick succession. "Again!" Anne's nervousness was slipping away; her breathing was freer. This really was good fun. . . . The horses were snorting, enjoying the sport more than the riders. After this, they did a low pole jump. Then Anne and Marjorie reined in and watched the others performing on the more difficult double, gate, and high jumps. It was a display of very good horsemanship, creditable to the Leamore school.

A little brown Irish terrier suddenly joined them from the house, barking and frisking around the horses. He sniffed in the hedges and started a hare, plunging across the field after it, yelping with excitement.

"Gone a - w - a-a-y!" Gone a - way!" mocked Eric, galloping furiously across the field after the dog, the others labouring behind them with shouts of encouragement. They pursued the excited terrier through several fields, the experts jumping every obstacle and the novices circling them. This, they told Anne, was the Leamore Hunt. A piercing whistle summoned them to tea, and they loped back to the house.

But tea was only a respite. The yard boy did not come

on Sundays and all the yard work was waiting for them, inexorably waiting. Patricia and Eric insisted that their mother should not help on Sundays. They left her reposing by the fire. Once again, Anne seized the barrow and began to trundle fodder to the stables, afterwards bending her tired back over the pump and vigorously plying the handle.

But the apex of living was reached in the Leamore yard on the eve of a hunt meet, or on the morning of that great event. The whole of the previous day was spent by Eric, Patricia, and the yard boy enthusiastically polishing every square inch of the saddlery, until the leather gleamed and the silver and nickel shone. The horses were clipped, trimmed, and groomed with equal thoroughness. Then the pair turned their attention to their own attire: coats had to be pressed, riding boots polished, hats brushed, and stocks reviewed. Patricia would then eye Anne critically and, though Anne was not riding to the hunt, but merely following, nevertheless her attire had to be correct. Her mentors would tell her sternly that, whatever short cuts she favoured on ordinary week ends, for the occasion of the hunt, brogues would not do under her jodphurs; she would have to wear low riding boots, yes, and string gloves and a felt hat. Leamore could not be disgraced for that great event by any slipshod unconventionality.

Early on the morning of the hunt, there would be a concerted rush for the yard to complete the horses' toilet. Their coats would get a final brush by Eric and the boy, while Patricia went around with a jam jar of blacking and a paint brush, industriously blacking their hooves. Horses with long manes would have them plaited, each of the innumerable little plaits being tied with ribbon. The

horse that kicked was labelled with a warning red bow. Mrs. Ryan, who had ceased to ride with the hounds since her husband's death, would run excitedly about the yard, supervising and critically examining each rider as he mounted. It was necessary that all should be correct. The honour of the house demanded it. The Ryans would speak with a sort of contemptuous despair of farmers' lads who turned up at the hunt, dressed anyhow in their ordinary working clothes, mounted on horses that had never seen a currycomb. They pointed out that they did not grudge these fellows their sport; the more good riders on good mounts, the better, but they blamed them with a sort of intense bitterness for their flaunting of riding decorum.

When Anne's friendship with the Ryans developed, she arranged to make her holiday in Ireland coincide with the hunting season, to that end bearing with fortitude the summer heats in Milan where life, anyhow since Jim Dalton came to it, had become both more pleasant and more problematic.

Chapter Nine

THE return to the familiar and friendly routine of the Milan office was to Anne a kind of homecoming. Bamfield hailed her with pleasant and unaffected relief and poured out the business news to her with an air of confidence that was subtly flattering. The two little Signore in the typists' room showed a new animation at her advent, and were gratifyingly intent on every word she uttered. Jim Dalton found a thousand reasons for coming into Bamfield's room, when Anne was working alone there, lingering to talk to her in his slow fashion, with a wistful expression on his large, plain face.

Jim Dalton had, in fact, been to Anne a disturbing element in the office for nearly two years now. The fact that he was a Catholic practising his religion gave him among all her acquaintances a prestige which she could never deny. But the growing power of his friendship brought a confusion to her thoughts that vented itself in irritation. He disturbed her singlemindedness of purpose. Her success in the strange commercial world she had entered had cast upon her a sort of spell from which she did not want to be awakened. The problems and the possibilities of her career fascinated her, and were the chief speculation of her mind.

One day Bamfield sent her to collect certain plans from the Italian engineer who shared Dalton's table. The

Italian was not there, but Anne found what she was seeking on his desk. As she took the *dossier*, she glanced up and met Dalton's eyes fixed on her. There was no mistaking their message of understanding and sympathy. She stared back, momentarily unable to detach her gaze from his. Then she turned away abruptly, annoyed to feel the colour mounting to her face. As she walked slowly up the stairs, she passed her hand over her forehead. She was trembling. "This will never do," she told herself resolutely. "I must stop this nonsense."

She sat at her desk and strove to concentrate, but her serenity was seriously disturbed. She could not forget that look so charged with understanding. And what fine eyes he had, brown eyes flecked with gold, that wonderfully illumined his face. He had not seemed in the least plain just then, but somehow transfigured. For the rest of the day, her mind continually wandered; she was haunted by that look that had magnetized her despite herself.

As she left the office that evening, Jim Dalton joined her outside. He raised his hat. "Will you have dinner with me this evening?"

"Yes, thanks," she smiled. "Where?"

"At Viani's, about eight. Would that suit you?"

"Yes. I'd love it, but—but, oh, might I bring Gaby? You see I had promised to go somewhere with her, and she won't be so disappointed if I bring her."

"Couldn't we wait then for another evening when you needn't bring Gaby?" he suggested gently.

"You'll like her," Anne told him with conviction. "She's most original."

"Very well then." He gave in. "I'll meet you and the most original one at Viani's at eight."

That dinner, to which Gaby, feverish with excitement and expectation, had to be almost physically dragged, was the beginning of a curious triple friendship. Jim at first could scarcely tolerate the gawky Gaby, but Anne always insisted on bringing her, ostensibly because her friend would mope if left alone. Later Jim developed a real liking for the voluble Swiss girl, who admired him extravagantly and insisted almost tearfully on his real merits. But the more eloquent Gaby waxed in this regard, the more resolute Anne became in treating Jim's attentions flippantly.

As spring lengthened into summer, and the first great heat went scorching through Milan, the three friends ventured on week ends to the Italian lakes. Anne always insisted on a good hotel for the Saturday night, disabusing Gaby's mind of exaggerated notions about its grandeur, and usually paying for her, as the Swiss girl was chronically short of money. Anne knew that her salary was larger than Jim's and for that reason would not allow him to bear all the expense of the expeditions. In the pleasant little paddle steamers that ply so lazily from one landing stage to the next, they spent somnolent Sundays splashing up and down Lake Maggiore, or Como, chatting, or merely dreaming with their eyes on the cypress-feathered castellated shores slipping slowly by. They would purchase their picnic meal at one of the calling places, while the passengers got on and off, dashing back to the steamer just in time, gripping their parcels of long loaves, cheese, grapes, and melons. Or sometimes they would climb the hills around the lake and have dinner at some cabin chosen by Gaby, who always managed to understand and make herself understood, no matter how barbarous the dialect

that was spoken. The trio would sit by the open hearth and watch their *polenta* being made for them, usually by the smiling man of the house. Two fried eggs would be laid on top of the *polenta*, and then the horn-handled knives and forks would be set out on a bare table, scrubbed white, and a small loaf for each with a flagon of sour, red wine.

Sometimes they ascended a higher mountain with the aid of the *funicolare* and had lunch at the more sophisticated inn invariably to be found perched on such a height. Jim had very good German field glasses and, after their meal, they would survey the surroundings, Gaby elucidating in her guttural Italian all the geographical points of interest. They would descend in the evening and return to their hotel for supper, drugged with air and sunshine. Anne looked back on those days afterwards as on a period of enchantment, when she seemed not to have a care in the world.

Meanwhile her growing acquaintance with the Italian language and people made her long to see the great cities of Italy: Venice, Florence, and Rome. She did not want to go alone. She felt that, unaided, she could not assimilate their grandeur. It would probably crush and bewilder her. The ideal companions would be Jim and Gabrielle, who also greatly desired to see more of Italy. But for a long while Gaby saw no means of going. Her family in Lugano (privately judged by Anne to be narrow, provincial, and "Victorian") had to be consulted about the least item of expenditure, and apparently they kept a tight rein on their Gaby.

"Papa, you know," Gabrielle would explain to the other two, "was a very great doctor, but now he lives in retire-

ment and likes just to sit in the sun and read the paper. But my brother Jean is enjoying the practice that Papa built up, and he has the great advantage of being able to consult with Papa and get his advice when he is in any doubt. Then there is my sister, Maria, who is four years older than I am. She has to do all the housekeeping with Mama. She has a very hard life. She is jealous of me, and envies me my freedom. Now she wishes to marry and is pressing Papa and Mama about it. They say they want all the money possible for her *dot*, so that she may make an advantageous marriage, and that is why they count the pennies they send to me.”

Anne considered that the family sounded sufficiently comfortable and she did not hesitate to incite Gaby to a little mild rebellion. One day a great opportunity came. The authorities in Gaby's academy organised for their pupils an excursion to Venice. Gaby wrote home representing the necessity for joining in with her class, and in due time the usual grumbling letter arrived with a modest cheque. She was nearly delirious with excitement. She secured for Anne one of the cheap tickets, available for six months, which the academy students could use in groups of two or three, according as they could arrange to go.

They waited until July, because that was the time everyone fled from Milan and only “poor wretches” and “unfortunates” remained in the city to stifle and wilt. Milan in July and August is generally condemned as a furnace, there being no expanse of water surface, no mountain breezes to cool its heat-laden air; there is nothing around that inland, arid city but the great plain of Lombardy with its parched rice fields, and the tall poplars rus-

tling dryly. The American and English colonies fled at that time to the sea or mountains, the Bamfields with the rest. And if Bamfield returned in the middle of a week to have a look around the office, he made a bee line back as quickly as he could to his family and the cooler air.

Anne decided to make the trip to Venice part of her annual holiday. She and Gaby would spend a fortnight there and Jim would join them for week ends.

In July, accordingly, the two girls, in a high state of expectation, set out for Venice. Their train arrived at midnight and, on their first glimpse of the lights, they leaned eagerly far out the window to see the approach of the magic city. There were all too many porters waiting for the few passengers. A little porter dressed in crumpled blue linen made a dive for them and grabbed their suitcase without a word, scurrying before them from the platform. “Hurry!” Anne entreated, convinced she was being robbed of her property. Gaby calmed her. “He’s seen the labels,” she explained. “There’s only one way of getting there, by gondola.”

Broad steps led down from the station entrance to the black, shiny water of the canal, where the gondolas were waiting. Their porter had already flung the cases into one of these boats, and was again bounding gleefully up the steps. They sprang aboard the swaying craft, the gondolier dipped his pole, and they glided off. He, too, had doubtless seen the labels and he asked no question about their destination. The Venetians are a silent folk, thought Anne. She felt uneasy. They seemed to be very low down in the water; the glistening brick sides of the canal rose steeply above their heads. They were apparently alone on the black waterway, which was very ill lighted

by infrequent bracket lamps throwing on the wall above their heads a grotesquely enlarged and menacing shadow of the gondolier. After all, they were at the mercy of this fellow, who looked at them indifferently and spoke no word. He had in that pole of his a very convenient weapon and his position, standing behind their backs, gave him the advantage over them. Now and again, as he steered the boat under a bridge or round a corner, he uttered a weird and incomprehensible cry, causing Anne to look about her apprehensively. Was he summoning confederates? There was profound silence in the strange city, except for the gurgling of the inky water against the sides of the boat. It was a relief when at last the gondola drew up before steps leading to the dimly lighted porch of their hotel, where they were expected and made welcome.

During the following days, Anne was so elated she often pinched herself to make sure she was really awake and not dreaming. Gondola driving in the bright sunshine was a vastly different affair from their frightening experience of the first night. Anne soon considered it the most delightful of all locomotion methods: cool, comfortable, airy, without jars or traffic jams. When Jim joined them, they spent whole days in a gondola, endlessly exploring, Gaby holding forth with tireless eloquence on her favourite subject of architectural styles, illustrating her points from the Casa d’Oro or from St. Mark’s. In the evening, they all went off to the Lido to watch the riders galloping their mounts, or to see the gorgeous lingering sunsets.

The friends did not prove very harmonious sightseers, their angles of vision being very diverse. Jim was interested chiefly in Anne. Anne was interested in history.

In the ducal palace she was lost in speculations on the fate of Marino Falieri; or she mooned about the Rialto, dreaming of Shylock; or thought of Byron as she gazed up at the Bridge of Sighs. Gaby, on the other hand, saw nothing in a building save its style; the people connected with it had no interest for her. She would give Jim and Anne a disquisition on its architectural points, squinting, frowning, and gesticulating; and then grind her teeth with irritation when one of them interrupted with some theory as to what room So-and-so had died in. As for pictures, if anyone mentioned the theme of a picture Gaby would snarl. A picture was a matter of technique, grouping, colour blending, and harmony; its subject meant nothing. The study of a monkey, or a Bacchus, or a Pan, or a still life of peaches in a bowl, could easily be more interesting than a representation of the Holy Family. The two girls argued interminably in the Venetian picture galleries, to the amusement of Jim and the scandal of the attendants and other visitors, whose looks seemed to insist on a reverent demeanour in the presence of art.

The time spent in Venice was a delight to Anne. She had learned, under the tutelage of Gaby, an appreciation of the art found in the many sights of the city and its beauty had wrought an emotional response. She had also found that the interest Jim was showing in her was somehow discomfiting in that it militated against the idea of developing her career. It was this latter that made her less reluctant to return to Milan and the office.

After Venice, Ireland again, where Anne completed her annual leave on another and stranger waterway, suffering once more that so sharp contrast of experience.

Nearer and nearer the island crept, while the frayed oars made rhythmic plaints in the rowlocks of the big awkward boat. She looked back to the jetty whence they had embarked; more groups of pilgrims were gathering to await the launching of another boat. On the slope above the pier, a row of cars was parked, the sun flashing from the chromium and glass fittings. The group of buildings: ticket office, garage, and dwelling house, looked diminutive as the boat drew further from the land. The whole lake and landscape were enclosed by low moss-green mountains, almost treeless, and without sign of human life or cultivation.

Bob shifted slightly closer to her on the narrow seat of the boat. There was a suggestion of protection in his air, but she averted her face to discourage conversation. She did not want an extension of the prose he had been volunteering on the train journey from Dublin to Donegal.

“This is Castleblayney, and that must be the lake down there,” or

“Anne, this is Enniskillen. We’re still in the North, I suppose. Good Lord, do you see that damned Union Jack over there? We’re in the North all right.”

Moreover, Anne was curiously excited. Ever since her first holiday at home, both Nora and Bob had been insisting that she did not know Ireland, and would never know it, until she had done the Lough Derg pilgrimage. More through idle curiosity — if truth were told — than from religious motives, she had this year consented to accompany the enthusiastic Bob. At least the adventure promised a new experience. But her mood of languid tolerance had been inevitably slipping from her all day,

and now she was expectantly alert. She preferred to disembark at Saint Patrick's Purgatory without a Cicerone. She wanted to sort out her own impressions.

Someone behind her on the crowded boat gave her a polite prod between the shoulder blades. She looked round. It was the Boy of the Train, his bright face twisted in a puzzled look:

“Is it real stone or some sort of imitation?” He jerked his chin toward the focus of the pilgrims’ eyes, a majestic white building that seemed to be floating on the water like a mirage.

“I believe it’s stone,” Anne told him shortly.

The youth could hardly be snubbed because he was a very old acquaintance, dating right back to the delay at Dundalk, a period like an aeon on a day when one has nothing to eat or drink except cold water. (This fantastic pilgrimage implies a fast of three days; she and Bob had left Dublin early that morning without breakfast.) At Dundalk, a persistent fellow had stood for a long time outside their carriage window, displaying the attractions of his tea and bun wagon. The Boy, their only fellow traveller in the carriage, had refused the refreshment with ferocity; and they had laughed when it transpired that he, too, was on his way to Lough Derg. Later, he had seriously explained to them that he was not in the least pious. With an earnestness that in itself was almost religious, he sought to dissociate himself from any notion of piety. He was going to Lough Derg solely because he was interested in architecture, and he wanted to see the new basilica. Visitors not being allowed on the island, he was making the pilgrimage.

The travellers were five hours in the train going from

Dublin to Pettigo. Before they were halfway there, Anne had begun to experience the rigours of fasting. A pulse was hammering in her head. Her thoughts tended to be resentful: "It's absurd," she concluded, "to make one fast and travel at the same time. To fast with any success, one should be left in a state of placid vegetation." Long before Pettigo was reached she had developed a headache. Bob glanced up from his reading and remarked that she was looking white. She admitted the headache.

"It's the train," he told her. "One often gets a headache like that in the first stages. 'Twill surely pass. The air on the Lough is so fresh, it would revive a corpse."

"Anyhow," she said hopefully, "I suppose if I feel too bad, I can postpone the penance business and go off to bed."

"No, that's just what you can't do," he told her with concern. "One has either to go through with it, or leave the island. The rules are very strict. I suppose one can understand that, really, human nature being what it is. Otherwise half the pilgrims would be falling out of rank."

"What happens if a pilgrim collapses?" she protested.

"Why, if it's a really bad collapse, a special boat is chartered to take the sufferer back to the mainland. I hope you won't have to do that," he concluded.

"Oh, no," she said doubtfully.

Later, she was grateful to the new acquaintance, who proved so entertaining that he made her forget her physical misgivings. The boy's hobby was architecture, and he rode it from Dundalk to Pettigo with the wildest flourishes and capers, undeterred by her open amusement, or the avuncular airs adopted by Bob.

“You’d swear ’twas built on the water,” he breathed now into the back of her neck.

“So it is,” Bob turned around and assured him. “Most of the structure is actually resting on piles driven into the lake bed, which is quite shallow there around the island.”

They were drawing near. The landing stage was thickly peopled with a barefooted crowd. At first glance Anne thought them a morose and wretched-looking crowd, with the dejected air of people marooned, and she almost expected one of them to wave a shirt and hail their craft. A number of them were sitting along the foreshore, their bare, pink feet touching the water, like a group of marine birds. Other pilgrims drifted toward the landing stage to look on at the disembarkment. They, too, were solemn eyed and tender as to gait, preserving the impression of puffins or razorbills. All the island inhabitants watched the newcomers’ arrival in a sort of owlish silence that seemed to Anne premonitory of harsh experience.

When the boat bumped in, she joined the stream of women hastening into a large, ugly building. A buxom Donegal lass with a brogue immediately took her in hand. “This way, Miss.” She followed her guide up a stone staircase, with whitewashed walls, leading to large dormitories, divided into small cubicles, one of which was allotted to her. It contained a little black bedstead and a tiny washstand, all the appointments being of the poorest and most primitive kind.

“D’ye know what to do?” the attendant asked pleasantly. Anne nodded, and her guide immediately disappeared. Bob had thoughtfully provided her with a printed leaflet of instructions. She knew what to do, but she detested

having to do it. A few minutes later, she stood barefooted outside the hostel door watching the pilgrims.

Hundreds of people were gyrating in rings on a little stony hillock. She stepped across and attentively considered the slope. So this was what Nora and Bob had been trying to elucidate for her with the aid of plates and saucers last night! She felt disgusted; how could anyone make such a bad fist of an explanation? They had made her imagine a great sward like a race course with a number of enclosures, each about the size of the paddock in which horses are paraded before a race, and in each enclosure a discreet number of pilgrims performing their devotions with ample elbow room. Why, the whole of this island did not comprise an acre, and it was overbuilt with hotels, churches, and administrative premises. The six penitential "beds," or circles of stone, were close together on a tiny slope, each "bed" hardly larger than the sand forts small boys erect on a seashore. Some hundreds of pilgrims were thickly clustered on this little slope, threading their way on the stones as they said their prayers. It had been to no avail that Nora had made Bob do a sketch of the whole pious route (to Anne it had seemed a nonsense version of geometry), her impression of vastness had not been in the least dispelled.

She took directions from her leaflet. She had now to make a Station, a prayer round beginning with a visit to the basilica. She padded across, wincing as her feet encountered the pebbles and picked her way through the loungers on the loggia steps. She found herself in a great octagonal edifice of unusual design, the style being Hiberno-Romanesque. It reminded her of an Italian baptistery; she remembered a very similar church in Florence, and

another in Cremona. But the island basilica is delightfully pure in style; there are no side chapels to break the line, for here there is no need of an enclosure for baptism, or a mortuary, or even confessionals (still retained in the old church). This is an interior most refreshing in its austerity: no flowers, no candelabra (except on the altar), no surplus furniture, the minimum number of images. The lower windows in the aisles are filled with gorgeous stained glass. She moved to look closer: Harry Clarke's, without a doubt, for in them are captured all the deepest and loveliest hues, the colours of marine pools, Chinese pheasants, macaws, tropical butterflies, gladioli, certain kinds of semiprecious stones, and . . . But there was the Boy of the Train, having reached his goal. His back was turned, and his round rather yokel face was tilted upward gazing at the great groups of electric lights suspended from the domed roof like clusters of gigantic berries.

“What do you think of them?” Anne whispered, nodding at the stained glass.

“Aw, I'm sick of stained glass,” he answered crossly, his short snub nose retreating in contempt. “It's a racket in Ireland now,” and with this cryptic pronouncement, he resumed his upward gaze.

Anne knelt down, buried her face in her hands, and strove to collect her thoughts. Why was she here? Curiosity? Merely avidity for a new experience, even a painful one? At least she hoped she had a nobler motive, and that she, too, would here receive spiritual help.

She hastened out into the sunlight and began her Station. This meant kneeling at the stone shaft of St. Patrick's cross; moving thence to St. Brigid's cross, where she faced the lake while renouncing with extended arms the

World, the Flesh, and the Devil; making four rounds of the basilica and then climbing the dreaded slope to walk on the sharp stones while she recited the prescribed prayers.

The six small circles of rude boulders and stones on the little hill are all that now remain of the monastic cells of Patrician days, but Anne reminded herself that she was moving on holy ground. These rude and almost ugly ruins are a site venerated with continuity since the fifth century, one of the wonders of the mediaeval world, and probably the source of Dante's inspiration when he wrote his fourteenth canto of the *Inferno*. Great names in literature were preoccupied with this place, among them Ariosto, Erasmus, Burton, Rabelais, and Shakespeare.

She found the Station an ordeal: the lengthy repetition of the prayers wearied her; the stones were sharp and slippery; she felt dizzy from lack of food. There were too many people doing the same thing at the same time and, as they knelt in groups around the ruined circles, they prayed into the back of her neck, or leaned heavily on her to save themselves from falling, or hoisted themselves from a kneeling posture with the aid of her shoulder, or they stole from under her eyes the very next smooth stone on which she had intended to step. But the strain eased at the last ring and as she finished her prayers by the edge of the lake, she found her heart unaccountably soaring. The sunshine was hopping off the sheet of water before her and swinging in the treetops of Friars' Island in the distance. From the lake side she returned to the ancient cross, prayed there, and re-entered the basilica. The first Station was ended.

Being now entitled to break her fast, she went back to

the hostel and sought out the dining room (courtesy title indeed). It was a large room with long tables running between two turf fires. The fare provided for the pilgrims was black tea, dry bread, and a kind of oaten cake as dry as a dog biscuit and not nearly so palatable. The tables were sparsely occupied with weary women, mostly sitting in despondent silence. Some of them who could not take the black tea were sipping cups of hot water, sweetened with sugar, or dubiously “flavoured” with salt and pepper. The attendants were willing to toast the bread and Anne made her meal off a stack of fresh toast and three cups of hot tea as sweet as molasses. The chief topic of conversation among the women was their state of misery on which they enlarged with relish: colic, inclination to retch, the megrim, aching calf muscles, and sore feet were all discussed.

Anne's headache vanished when she took the food and she felt almost gay. She sat for a little while at the turf fire beside a girl in trim tweeds who smiled at her. Emboldened, Anne asked her, “What's the matter with these women?” indicating a trio drooping over a table, their hair unkempt, their clothes rumpled, their eyes vacant with fatigue.

The Tweed Girl laughed. She had a serious face, lighted up by attractive dark eyes.

“They've made the night vigil and they're done in, poor things. But take care you don't mock, because you'll look like that yourself this time tomorrow.”

Before she attacked her second Station, Anne walked to the belfry on the top of the little hillock and looked down for a while on the fantastic island scene. Among the endless files passing around the slope, kneeling, genuflecting, murmuring, jingling Rosary beads she recognised three

of the pilgrims: one was a professor in the National University, another was a writer, and the third was a woman doctor building up a successful practice in Rathgar. Was it real, she wondered, and was this the twentieth century? Anyhow, it was a scene unique to this Island, to be witnessed here and nowhere else in the world; something so queerly unearthly one could readily believe that all the pilgrims were shades on a genuine mount of purgation under a spectral sky.

Into the basilica once more — how sublime was that interior! The lofty domed apse, all white and bare above, the lower walls and floor of the sanctuary lined with delicately tinted marble; silvery, lake-impregnated light above and a million stories in the pencilled marble below: sea yarns, narratives of polar adventures, and dim half tales of mystery and imagination. In contrast with the white light around the altar, the naves were shadowy and subdued, their windows filled with glowing glass.

As she performed her final Station, the sun was magnificently gilding the world, ricochetting from the roof of the men's hostel and the Prior's house, on to the belfry, and the ridge of St. Mary's Church, slashing the green sward of the hillock, and leaping in the little sycamore tree (the only tree on the Island) dividing St. Dabheoc's cell from that of St. Molaise's. A tall Franciscan immediately in front of her was evidently a practised hand. He lost no time, but worked away at his prayers with a mighty sort of concentration. She kept his swinging brown habit and cord in view and tried to galvanise her pace to equal his. But she said her prayers nevertheless in a trance of exhaustion.

Afterwards, she made a complete tour of the Island.

Excepting the basilica, there was nothing to admire: two huge and rather ugly hostels, one for men and one for women; the Prior's little whitewashed house and the cottages of the boatmen; the old chapel of St. Mary's; an enormous boathouse provided with beds for overflow accommodation when the Island was crowded (which happens frequently during the ten weeks of the pilgrimage season); all these buildings surround the little hillock of antiquity where the circles of stones are disposed. Finally she sat on a garden seat at the back of St. Mary's Church, where the Tweed Girl joined her with a kind inquiry:

“How are you surviving it?”

Anne owned to having felt at first a rage of resentment, mere fury with herself for having been captured into such hardship, when she might have been anywhere else, doing something pleasant. “But I think I'm beginning to understand it faintly,” she concluded.

“The understanding will come later,” said the other. “The first challenge of this place is its simplicity, and nowadays we have so lost touch with simplicity that it sets our teeth on edge. This is the fifth time I have made the pilgrimage and I like it better every time I come. Lough Derg is one of the last remaining little corners of antiquity, and the spirit of the ancients really broods here. All places in the world compete in offering things to please the body and distract and allure the mind. Lough Derg offers nothing except simplicity and quietude. You arrive here and there's absolutely nothing. Thus you're confronted with the reality of yourself. Now, I think it's such a kindness to the human spirit to give it that chance. Why, if this place were not in Ireland and I heard about it, I think I'd travel the whole of Europe to reach it. To

me, it's the island of release. Do you realise how rare it is? I don't suppose there's another place like it in the world where one has such an uninterrupted chance to do penance. Have you noticed with what extraordinary completeness distractions are eliminated? There's not even a meal served here in the formal sense. There's no liturgy, no music, no grandiloquent, rhetorical forms of petition, no elaborate method of contemplation, only the simplest and the oldest prayers. It is better than any form of retreat, because the soul is left alone to find herself in peace. Most retreats are far too comfortable. They regale you with the best food, while they administer large doses of syrup to the soul. If one has to think out a problem, or arrive at a great decision, there's absolutely no place like Lough Derg, because here there's a silence around you and room to think."

They stood up and strolled toward the church, taking the concrete path surrounding it. Below them the water murmured and across the lake the desolate Donegal mountains seemed to stir under veils of gauze.

“It's rather like the deck of a ship, isn't it?” remarked Anne, turning from the water to the towering cupola of the church, “and there's the masthead.”

“Or you could call it a luxury liner,” snorted the Tweed Girl. She seemed embarrassed, now that she had spoken so freely, and anxious to withdraw again into herself.

Before the night vigil began, Bob anxiously sought out Anne to tell her to stay in one of the galleries, where she would be warmer than in the nave of the church. Wrapped in a heavy coat, she followed his friendly counsel. Four Stations have to be recited in the church during the night, four incredible blocks of prayer, a truly terrific iteration

of Paters, Aves, Creeds, said aloud by all the pilgrims in unison: three hundred and ninety-six Paters, six hundred and forty-eight Aves, and one hundred and twenty-four Creeds, as though the congregation were trying to shake the doors of Heaven with their fusillade, their barrage of Paters, Aves, Creeds. Someone in the body of the church gave out the prayers and the hours wore slowly past.

At first Anne could not concentrate. She felt exhausted. The day's experience confused her. She could not rid her mind of the strangeness of walking round the stony circles on that hillock, among the endless files of pilgrims. Her feet still ached. Feet: she closed her eyes and sighed. Such feet she had seen that day! They seemed to crowd up again upon the retina of her eyes, hundreds of bare feet, as she had seen them preceding her on the stones, like a Dantean vision. What awful and unlovely feet, eloquent of every ill: corns, bunions, callouses, dropped insteps, toes deformed by rheumatism, or twisted into every kind of malformation, ingrowing and freakish nails, legs showing great raised varicose veins that were dark blue and as thick as whipcord, ankles puffy and swollen, or decorated with the strangest lumps and nodules. Poor feet of tortured humans, the victims of an absurd civilisation.

Pilgrims are permitted to leave the church for a short while after every Station, as fresh air and movement are a help in keeping awake. Outside, the first half of the Vigil was illuminated and cheered by a moon in three-quarter gold-visaged profile, which descended slowly into the foggy hills about three o'clock. It cast an oboe-shaped glitter across the ruffled water, the tapering end touching the Island and the broad end beneath the mountains. Anne sat down wearily at the foot of a loggia pillar. All

around her, cigarette ends were glowing in the darkness. A man went to the tap for a cup of water, and afterwards noisily splashed his face. Half a dozen pilgrims imitated him, then scores, and soon there was a merry queue waiting for cups of water. Dark females in groups promenaded around the basilica to keep themselves warm, desultory scraps of conversation floating behind them. One said to another, "Sometimes we get grand loin chops," the rest being lost as they turned the corner. Presently, two more women passed, engaged in an animated discussion on the different ways of cooking figs. Women, Anne reflected, spoil situations by bringing their kitchens with them. The Boy of the Train joined her and drew her attention to the shape of the tall church windows, through which the amber light was shining. The hand bell tinkled, summoning the pilgrims back into the church. The prayer wheel began once more its inexorable revolutions.

It is a method of prayer that produces a dual effect, beginning by stunning the mind like hammer blows on the head. One mumbles, heedless of the words. But when the first stage of listless reaction has passed, the monotony of prayer has the same result as that of chanting the liturgy in an unvaried tone: the whole mind begins to focus on the words. When one arrives at saying the fiftieth Creed at Lough Derg, one really begins to take note of it, and at the hundredth, one begins to mean it. Presently those simple and unvarying prayers begin to rise up hugely like a loom stretching from earth to heaven, on which the whole web of life is hung. From having no meaning, they burst with sudden luminosity into a thousand meanings, into one hundred thousand meanings. From saying nothing, they say everything. They are the encyclopaedias in

the total of languages. They express all and nothing need be added. When one has said them, everything has been said. Because in truth these simple prayers have formidable implications, and it is only in the silence of a place like Lough Derg that one arrives at a beginning of understanding their immense connotations.

Next time the pilgrims got a break the moon was almost sucked into the fog-shawled hills. The reflections on the water were less brilliant, less like a Monte Carlo gambler's dream of shimmering stacks of counters. The stars were taking over, growing ever more luminous as the moon declined. Planets kissed the lake in shy, diffident reflections. Cygnus swooped over the basilica, its cross cumbent over the cross erect; Delphinus was like a slanted vessel pouring star dew on the Island; Auriga took a short cut and appeared over the women's hostel. Anne walked down to the pier and looked back to the dark cluster of buildings dominated by the basilica, its upper tier of windows glowing. An outside lamp threw a faint light on the crowds squatting and lolling about the porches, reminding her of an opera setting for *Faust* or *Cavalleria Rusticana*. The subdued murmur of voices mingled with the soft plashing of the water. She was conscious of an extraordinary sense of peace such as she had never before experienced. All the blessed quietude of this Island sanctuary, that stillness so deep and rare, consecrated by fifteen hundred years of endurance, rested on her mind like a benediction.

Bob joined her with kind enquiries. She denied that she was sleepy, or cold, or overexhausted. The stars were slipping from their places. The nearer islands could now be discerned: blurred, ghostly, very fragile, as though a shout would scare them away. The lopolop of water around

the concrete projection said plainly that they were fools to be awake. Then dawn fought tooth and nail with night and the sky became suddenly filled with floating veils that parted to reveal rust-stained interiors, fogs that fell asunder, or blended into dingy rose and dried blood fragments. A zephyr wandered across the lake and stirred her hair. Bob yawned and prosily remarked: "I can see your face now, Anne." (For light had beaten dark to the ropes of the surrounding mountains and all the lake was dawn grey.) A simple remark, but Anne reflected, "After death, conversation will be like that!"

Daylight, wan as a bedridden creature, had its being in drifting fogs when she took a stroll before Mass. The tune of the lapping water had changed to a gurgle; dew drenched the short grass in front of the Prior's house. Pied wagtails twittered as they tripped along the edge of the lake. The sun was breaking out, competing with the ragged fogs for a place in the sky. The water was becalmed. Anne leaned on a low wall behind the old chapel, inconsequently thinking of Botticelli's "Birth of Venus," the clear, clean light of the painting with its impression of a boisterous wind above, and a scarcely mobile water below, and Venus, the somnambulist, crossing the azure blue on a magic shell. The determined clanging of the Mass bell brought her back to reality.

No question about it, that day was long. Pilgrims are not allowed to go to bed until half-past nine. It was the longest day in Anne's life. Its leaden minutes crawled by on sticky feet that made no progress. The hours hung back. Time stood revengefully still. At half-past eleven, she was already ashamed of having consulted her watch so often, and holding it to her ear to make sure it had not

stopped. By the afternoon, life had resolved itself into a wrestle with sleep. When she knelt to pray in the church, her eyelids weighted with lead, drooped and closed in her own despite. If she sat by the turf fire in the dining room to warm her blue toes, sleep seized her with inescapable mastery. When she fled from that warmth to sit on one of the benches outside, the figures of the other pilgrims dissolved into haze and she found herself nodding. She spent her time running from post to pillar, trying to shake off the enemy.

She postponed her meal of black tea and dry toast until the last moment, remembering that she had to keep up the struggle against sleep until half-past nine. At four o'clock, she crawled to the table for the food, utterly defeated, no longer feeling that she was a sentient being, but only a body most ill-used, famished for food, and craving for sleep.

After the evening devotions, something very like gayety spread through the pilgrims who were going to bed. At the appointed hour, there was a concerted rush for the rooms where rows of basins set at floor level invited harassed feet. The long benches in front of the foot baths were soon crowded, and attendants bustled busily about with relays of fresh soap and towels. There was a buzz of animated chatter and laughter, everyone being conscious of relief that the worst rigours of the pilgrimage were over.

How inviting seemed the little bedsteads with their coarse, clean linen and generous supply of blankets. Anne made a blissful surrender to that sleep she had spent the day evading. She dropped like a plummet into a soundless abyss, into depths cool and sweet, a deep, blank and dream-

less sleep, miraculously restorative, where no whisper penetrated until the urgent clamour of the bell awoke her on the following morning at six o'clock.

As the boat was due to take them to the mainland at 11:30, there was no time to be lost. After Mass, two Stations had to be said to complete the pilgrimage. Before Anne had her shoes on, a man in a peaked cap blew three warning notes on a bugle, intimating that pilgrims who were leaving should take their places in the boat. There was an answering scurry and bustle of embarkation. As the huge, ungainly craft swayed away from the landing pier, some of the pilgrims began to sing.

Bob was full of brotherly solicitude, and insisted on finding a compartment on the train in which they could be alone. But, just before it started, their privacy was invaded by the Boy of the Train. The trio made merry again as they ate water biscuits and drank lemonade, an alternative to the Island fare which is permitted on the third day's fast.

Mysteriously, the Boy whose hobby was architecture, had nothing to say about the basilica. He was not to be drawn. It was as though he, too, had suffered some "sea change into something rich and strange." He rode his hobbyhorse no longer.

"Anne, tell us your impressions," Bob challenged her. But she took refuge in badinage. Her thoughts on that island experience were not for public disclosure.

Chapter Ten

VENICE proved to be Gabrielle's last caper of freedom. Anne came into their room one day to find the Swiss girl looking pale and downcast. When questioned, she said in a faltering voice she had just received two letters that caused her much sorrow and annoyance. She handed the missives to Anne with a tragic look of despair. Written in execrable French, full of grammatical errors and misspellings, they were from Papa and Mama informing her that Maria's marriage had at last been arranged to everyone's satisfaction and the ceremony was to take place very soon. Gaby was to come home for the occasion and henceforth she would have to live at home. They added that they had done their utmost for her now, in giving her the very best education they could afford, with "travel in Italy" for a finish. She was to pack up and come home. Mama would be lonely after Maria and would need help in the house.

Gaby took a week over her packing. She dropped tears on every battered textbook she arranged in her shabby trunk. She wept so often and so bitterly that her poor plain face became positively hideous. Anne helped her to assemble and pack her trifling possessions, wishing to be helpful in some manner.

"They ought to let you go on with it," she sympathised. "You have such genius at this sort of thing, you should be

an architect, or at least a teacher of drawing. You've got nowhere yet. They've just wasted their money."

"They'll encourage me to design pincushions and fire screens for bazaars," said Gaby bitterly. "That's as far as I'll get. The housekeeping is more important. Papa's *minestrone* and *insalata* must be right. Can't you see my future? I'll have to set out every morning with my little purse and my shopping bag and buy all the food economically. Then I'll have to come back and help the *bonne* to make the beds just right and polish the floors just right. And I'll sit in the evenings and mend Papa's and Jean's clothes, and Mama will try to make me begin lace-making for my own trousseau. *Trousseau!*" she repeated bitterly. "Why the decorations anyway? They'll marry me off to some horrid fellow who lives in a flat up three flights of stairs just like our flat. They'll sit talking about it, and passing the bank books around before I ever catch a glimpse of him. They won't care if he's fat and has pimples and a moustache. That was Maria's *romance*," she explained to Anne. "Nothing to look forward to after that but more buying of groceries and vegetables and more housework and more sewing, and having children and putting washing out on lines at the back window...."

Anne agreed that it was a bleak vista.

Gaby would alternate between such gloomy and tearful forecasts of her future life and expansive expressions of her undying and eternal love for Anne, interspersed with fervent advice.

"*Ma pauvre petite amie, ma pauvre petite amie,*" she would break off to exclaim, seizing Anne in a bearlike hug. "What will you do? What will become of you in this place without me? You'll miss your Gaby dreadfully. Don't

offend the others, I implore you. Don't set them against you any more. It's very dangerous."

With a touching humility, she thanked Anne for the very happy time she had given her. And she waxed weepingly sentimental over Jim:

"Your coldness to him is cruel, Anne. You will break his heart if you do not show him some response. Poor Jim, such a gentleman, so upright and gallant. That is romance, I tell you, Anne, real romance, not like what my fate is going to be. You are a lucky girl, and sometimes I think you are going to throw away your good fortune with both hands. He loves you, don't you know it?"

"He hasn't said so," retorted Anne.

"How could he, when you have never given him a single chance! One has only to see how he looks at you to know he loves you. Sometimes I think I did wrong to go so many places with the two of you, instead of leaving you together — "

"I wouldn't have gone without you," Anne reassured her.

"Yes, you were always so pressing, and then I did so love going to those places, and it was such a wonderful chance for me. It will never come again. My life is over now, it is all over," she mourned. "But, Anne, you must marry Jim. Do not lose him, I implore you. He is a real Parsifal. One does not meet his kind twice in a lifetime."

Anne was silent and Gaby glanced up from her packing to encounter a sternly reproachful look. She sat back on her heels.

"What matter if he is poorer than you?" she protested. "Forget all that. He will forge ahead, especially if you make some sacrifice to stand by his side and assist him."

It was not a picture that appealed to Anne.

"Gaby," she said pityingly, "you are a long way from emancipation. I do not believe that marriage is the only and inevitable goal for a woman who's not a nun. I enjoy my freedom and I want to enjoy it for quite a long while yet. Exploring the possibilities of my career is romance enough for me."

"You are mad," Gaby told her almost fiercely. "I don't understand a word you're saying. When love comes, *love*, the supreme gift life has to offer. . . . I'm afraid your dreadfully self-centred, Anne, I would almost say selfish. . . ."

The other turned away and Gaby slapped down the lid of her trunk, vaulted it, and seized Anne in a stifling, penitential hug.

"Forgive me, *ma pauvre petite amie*, I did not mean it. You have been so good to me. I did not mean what I said. I should not interfere, I know that. I do not understand your northern mind, but oh, I do so like your Jim. . . ." She wept again on Anne's shoulder.

Gaby was popular. Five others, in addition to Anne, crushed themselves into the carozza that took her to the station. They all kissed her repeatedly as they drove along. To Anne, looking on rather coldly, it was an undignified and embarrassing scene. "*Ta chevelure!*" she reminded Gaby repeatedly, "*et, chérie, ton chapeau!*" As the Swiss girl entered the train, the others gave her the Milanese farewell: "*Ciao*" (pronounced chow), "*ciao, ciao,*" they yelled. Gaby hung her doleful visage out of the window, her hair in wisps, her red-rimmed eyes swimming, her nose swollen and shiny. "*Ciao, ciao,*" she blubbered, "*O carissime, carissime, ciao, ciao.*"

Anne went sadly back to the empty room, thinking of

those well-thumbed textbooks and sketches in Gaby's trunk. Poor girl, poor girl: her artistic soul, her sound aesthetic judgment, her honest industry, her fervent enthusiasm, were now all broken dreams.

In the office next day, when Anne described Gaby's departure to Jim, he laughed rather unfeelingly.

"A good sort and a sport," he pronounced, "but, honestly, Anne, I can't pretend I'm sorry that the duenna's gone. Don't champion any more lame dogs now, will you, until we've had some little time to ourselves?"

Anne turned away from the meaning in his eyes and became absorbed in her work.

The following Saturday, he suggested Menaggio for the week end. "It will be almost the last before winter sets in," he reminded her. She hesitated for a fraction of a second, then assented with a show of eagerness. "I must get this over," she told herself. Moreover, apart from being with Jim, she greatly enjoyed those week ends on the lakes.

They took an early afternoon train which was crowded. This was the first time they had ever been away alone together and on the short journey Anne tried to shake off a sense of impending cataclysm. But she forgot her uneasiness when they reached the blue and silver world of the enchanted lake, walled by wooded heights on which the grey of the olive trees alternated in bands with the brilliant green of deciduous trees. Autumn had as yet but intensified the tints of this laughing landscape. There was still a riot of colour in the lovely gardens around the smiling villas. The sunshine glittered on the water. The air was fragrant and exhilarating.

At Como, they boarded a steamer for Menaggio. Jim

was his usual restfully silent self. He lounged in the sun, bareheaded. The lake breezes ruffled his wiry black hair and whipped a faint colour into his habitually pale face. They were alone in a corner of the deck for the few hours of this journey and, since his attitude was no different from usual, Anne began to feel reassured.

At Menaggio, they disembarked but, by mutual consent, avoided the hotels, and set off for a walk, or rather a saunter, along the lakeside. Since the whole of this region is dotted with hotels, they could afford to be indifferent about their accommodation. Soon after they set out, dusk veiled the opposite shore in a gauze wrapping. The surrounding heights seemed to be merging into the sky. They quickened their pace, combating by exercise the sudden chill in the evening air. The steamers began to show lights; the splash of the water on the shore became louder; stars faintly pricked the sky. Anne chatted incessantly about her holiday in Ireland. Jim was always an excellent listener, encouraging her chatter. Presently they came within sight of a landing stage, its stone jetty gleaming whitely through the darkness now quickly falling.

"Where are we?" asked Jim, peering uncertainly.

"Cadenabbia," Anne declared. "We must have walked about four miles. This is the Mecca of English and American tourists. They'll be all round us tonight."

They chose a hotel at random, scarcely noticing its name in their eagerness for a meal. There were few in the dining room, as it was not yet the official hour for dinner. Everything tasted delicious to their sharpened appetites: spaghetti and cheese, Sauterne, cutlets and salad, fresh rolls, and for sweet a *zabaione*.

After dinner, Anne forgot her resolution to be cautious

and suggested having a look at the grounds before dark. They strolled out. The garden dropped down to the lake and was so admirably sheltered that it still held the warmth of the midday sunshine. A crescent moon was rising over the water. They leaned on a wooden railing and watched the lights of Bellagio strengthening on the opposite shore. Jim indicated a statue, at the end of a pathway winding along the water's edge.

“What would it be?”

“Don't think I know it,” Anne told him. “There are lots of *Canova's* around here, but hardly out of doors.”

In the vapoury moonlight, the statue was alluring among its cypress trees.

“Looks like a grotto,” Jim said. “It's probably a Madonna. Let's look....”

“It can't be a famous work,” Anne said positively, “or Gaby would have dragged me to it long ago.”

“No,” Jim agreed, “but for all that, it may be very beautiful and well worth seeing.” It was quite dark under the trees, but Jim plunged forward excitedly to investigate his discovery. It was in a neighbouring garden and they had to cross a boundary fence. Before Anne could overtake him, he gave a howl of disgust.

“What?” she cried.

He was pointing with his finger to the plinth. The statue was no Madonna, but a dumpy little woman, crowned and martial, holding a trident, and across the base was written, *Britannia*.

Anne clicked her tongue in sympathy with his feelings. “Of course,” she began, “there's a hotel Britannia hereabouts . . . and they've set her to rule the waves of Como to please the English tourists . . .”

But Jim suddenly doubled up with uncontrollable mirth. So restrained and quiet were his ways, Anne had never before seen him convulsed with laughter. His mood was infectious. She laughed with him at their joint discomfiture, until they were reeling with merriment around the uninspiring Britannia, and small birds in the bushes twittered with alarm. They turned back. Jim was recovering his breath as he helped her over the fence. At the wooden railing, they paused again and leaned on it to look at the water creaming on the pebbles below.

“You don’t know what a reverent mood I was in,” said Jim. “I was even going to say a prayer.”

The sudden change in his voice warned Anne. Panic assailed her. “I’m in for it,” she thought. “But I must not run. We must see it out.”

“Poor Gaby,” he continued, speaking with a heavy difficulty that touched his companion. “She was such a good confidante. I told her all about my feelings for you and she encouraged me to hope. *Anne, if you don’t say something now . . .*”

“Jim,” she said, linking his arm impulsively. “You know that I like you immensely. Can’t we go on as we are for the present — the best friends in the world? Don’t, don’t say any more just for the moment. Give me a chance,” she pleaded.

He straightened up, squaring his shoulders. “No, I must know,” he said. “I must know now. We can’t go on like this. Anne, I love you. Don’t you care for me even a little bit?”

He put his arm round her shoulders and his voice was unsteady. “Or is there someone else?”

“No,” she said positively, and he drew a breath of relief.

“I like you immensely, Jim,” she repeated, “and I value our comradeship more than I can express. But *love*, I — I — don’t know anything about it. I’m not quite sure that I believe in it. I have always been disposed to laugh at it as an invention of the novelists, or an illusion that people will upon themselves. . . .”

“You’re wrong,” he told her gently. “Love is a reality. But you’re honest, and I’m quite satisfied that you should learn about it gradually. On the strength of the small return you make me, will you marry me?”

“Oh, no, I’m not prepared to do that.” At the alarm in her voice, he drew away from her stiffly.

“Let me explain myself,” she urged. “I — I don’t want my life to be complicated with emotional crises just now. I don’t want to lose my freedom. Things are so interesting as they are. . . . You know, marriage is the end . . .” She spoke in tones of doubtful disparagement.

“It’s very clear you don’t love me,” he said with heavy sadness.

“I don’t love anyone else either,” she almost pleaded. “I love your companionship, Jim. Can’t we continue to enjoy it for another while without talking of such drastic things as marriage. . . .”

“No,” he told her with finality. “I’ve lost a year as it is. You don’t know, perhaps, Anne, but I was offered promotion last year if I went back to America, to the Atlanta branch. I wanted badly to go. I don’t like the Italian office. It’s a dead end for me, but I refused the offer because of you. I knew from the first moment I saw you that my heart was hopelessly committed, and I just had to go on seeing you. But I’m twenty-eight and it would be dangerous for me to refuse advancement a second time. My whole life is

in your hands, Anne, what are you going to do with it?"

She was aghast. The rhythmic throb of the water seemed to echo his words.

"I know I haven't much to offer you," he went on ruthlessly. "But, Anne, surely you're not thinking of that? Surely you're not hesitating because you happen to have a bigger salary than mine, and the power of attorney which I haven't, and things like that?"

"No, no," she protested. "But I'm very well as I am, and marriage is so final. It's the end, you know. I always rather, rather looked down on it. I thought it was for two sorts of girls: for the ineffectual sheltered kind, who never had to earn their living; and for the others who failed at careers. I — I haven't failed —"

"You think too highly of your work," he said. "Oh, I know, no one knows better than I do, how successfully you do it. But to the general view, after all, you are but one of the multitude of girls who work in offices."

This was not tactful. Anne was wounded. "You are thinking of American girls," she cried. "They glide inevitably from their homes to a commercial college, and from that to an office. It costs them nothing. But I had a very different start. I told you all about Pallasgrange and Mallingsford. . . . I spent so much in sweat and toil to get to my present position that naturally I prize it, possibly beyond its value. . . . If you told me it's gone to my head, I would believe you. . . ."

"Don't let it do that," he said earnestly. "Oh, we all know how amazingly capable you are; how you carried on the whole thing alone during the strike and so on. . . . Bamfield praises you to the sky. He told me the London people have you on their list for managerial office. If you keep

on like that there is no reasonable doubt that you'll sit in a managing director's chair some day with a thousand a year. But does it appeal to you, Anne? You are young and fresh and beautiful now. Do you want to wither into an official of the I.E.E.C.? How will the thing look to you in ten or fifteen years' time when your bloom has faded? Do you think a thousand a year will compensate you then for an unnatural existence, for loneliness and disillusionment? Perhaps I'm hopelessly Victorian, but I am never impressed by women in really good posts. I think they are sure to have paid too high a price for it in secret unhappiness"

Managing director — her name on the list — a thousand a year. . . . To Anne this was an exciting forecast. She experienced that queer thrill of exultation which success always brought her, making her heady like an intoxicating draught. For a second or two, the real issue was obscured by the dazzling possibilities of her own career. What fun it would be to show she could rise even to such demands. . . .

Jim was silent for a moment. "My little plan," he resumed, "was to ask you to make the decision this week end, and on Monday I would approach Bamfield about my transfer back to America, and we would hope for the best. Then we would go out there together, and you could stay with my mother until we had a little corner fixed up for ourselves. . . . I have already told her about you in my letters and that is her suggestion. She has been urging it on me for the past six months. She was dreadfully grieved when I refused the Atlanta offer and I had to tell her why. . . ."

Anne was again moved by his virile directness. Sudden

tears blinded her, but she strove with all her strength to overcome the intrusive emotion. She was almost undone. Some unsuspected and traitorous weakness in her was actually urging her to surrender, to confide her whole life, her will, and her identity to Jim. She seemed to have become a dual personality at war with herself.

"Materially speaking, 'tisn't a handsome offer," he went on with an attempt at lightness. "We would have to begin in the usual sort of flat. Married to me, of course, you would never have the same spending money that you have now. But in my heart I believe you would not mind that . . . if only you cared about me," he concluded mournfully, bending slightly to peer at her face in the half light. As she still did not speak, he pleaded softly:

"On the other hand, no man can offer more than his heart, his life, and his all." There was a pause.

"Sex," she managed to blurt out at last.

"What?"

"I have never felt any curiosity about it, only distaste. . . . Marriage means exploring all that too . . . oh, I couldn't. . . ."

"It would all solve itself gradually," he told her quietly. "If you would only start out on the great adventure with me, so that I could be sure of you. . . . I should be content with such little crumbs of affection to begin with. . . ."

Again there was a pause. The murmuring lake seemed to fall silent, listening with the trees and the vapoury sky for her answer. It is unfair, she thought with sudden heat, to force upon her the responsibility of deciding such a tremendous issue.

"Not now," she faltered. "Oh, Jim, don't make me answer now. I don't want to hurt you. . . ."

“You have answered,” he said coldly, turning away.
“Shall we go in?”

They walked back to the hotel in heavy silence.

“Good night, Jim,” she said, pausing dispiritedly at the door.

“Good night, Anne.”

Some weeks later, Anne was reading alone in the deserted *salon* of the hostel, reclining in a corner of the couch with her feet tucked under her.

Someone quietly entered and sat on the other end of the seat. Anne glanced up: the newcomer was a stranger, must be just recently arrived, and there were in the *salon* five or six unoccupied armchairs where she could conveniently sit! *Buona sera*, she mumbled frigidly, and continued to read.

Presently she was disturbed by a sniff from the other occupant of the couch. She continued to read, irritation in her heart. Would this fool of a girl drive her back to her room, where the chair was not so comfortable, nor the light for reading half so good?

A louder sniff. Anne resignedly lowered her feet to the ground. She glanced at the girl who was dabbing her eyes: probably not Italian, as she was fair haired and had a pudgy figure. Anne was about to run away from the intruder, but she hesitated and after a pause said with an effort:

“Can I do anything to help you, Signorina?”

“Thank you,” faltered the other gratefully. “You are kind. This great city . . .”

“Have you only just come here?”

“Yes, this very moment. Mama brought me here and has

just gone. We stayed in a hotel last night. I am a whole day's journey from home now."

"You're not an Italian?"

"*Oh, si, si, sicuro, Sienese.*"

Anne was surprised. She had imagined that all the Sienese were dark and slender and graceful and quick. Here was a girl as fair as herself and dumpy and slow.

"Where is your room?" she pursued.

"I don't know yet. The Signora Direttrice is very occupied. She told me to wait here. . . . I feel so lonely."

"It will pass. They are all very nice here. You will find them most kind."

Anne, however, was frowning. There was place for one in her room and she had just been beginning to enjoy her solitude. She had grown used to Gaby's absence. There were vacancies in two other double rooms too, and it occurred to her that by saying a word in Dr. Carton's ear, she might continue to enjoy her privacy. It would be awful to be thrown into the constant company of this snivelling child.

"My name is Anne Farrelly," she told the Sienese. "I'm Irish, but I'm over here nearly four years and I know my way about now. I'll do anything I can to help you."

"Thank you, oh, thank you," the other said fervently. "My name is Fiammetta Bartanelli di Bagno. I am here to study English. I have never been away from home before, except to a boarding school near Siena, and I find it terribly strange to be left now at such a distance from Papa and Mama."

She put away her handkerchief resignedly, giving the other an opportunity to see her face. Fiammetta was not well named. She had sandy hair, sandy eyelashes and eye-

brows, pale grey eyes, and very inharmonious features. Now she looked pale and miserable. Anne decided that she was an incurable Mama's pet, for Fiammetta was about her own age.

"*Ci diamo del tu*" (Let us give each other *tu*), said Fiammetta impulsively, laying her hand appealingly on Anne's knee. The latter was finding it increasingly difficult to disengage herself from the newcomer. She smiled her assent and stood up.

Just then Dr. Carton appeared in the doorway, and beamed on the two girls. "So you've made a friend already," she said to Fiammetta. "That's right, that's right, my dear." She spoke to Anne in English. "Would you object if I put her in with you? You'll have to have someone in your room tonight anyway. There are two Americans arriving by the evening train."

Anne assented at once. Better to have poor Fiammetta, obviously harmless, than an unknown.

"Come along," she said to the Sienese. "You're to be in with me. I'll show you." Resignedly she led the way and helped to carry up Fiammetta's baggage, installing her in Gaby's vacant place.

The two settled down at once to a cordial comradeship. Fiammetta was terrified of the city and needed a lot of help. She attended a school of languages daily and, even after several weeks in Milan, she was still capable of taking the wrong tram home and losing herself in the suburbs, to her terror and distraction. Anne became reconciled to the task of mothering Fiammetta. The position rather amused her. Here am I, she thought, from the other end of Europe, and I have to help this Italian girl find her feet in one of her own cities. Fiammetta spoke beautiful

Italian, without a trace of dialect, but she was incredibly slow at English. It was weeks before she grasped that English was really Anne's language; she persisted in thinking it was an acquirement, which gave her an immense respect for Anne. She confused Ireland (*Irlanda*) with Iceland (*Islanda*) and confessed she had no idea what language was spoken in that remote place! Even when Anne explained to her exhaustively the geographical and linguistic facts about Ireland, she did not make use of the advantage to practise on Anne her little store of English phrases. From first to last, their medium of communication was Italian.

Fiammetta practised her religion. She was the first Italian girl Anne had met, who recognised the obligation of going to Sunday Mass. This was a pleasant change for the Irish girl, who now for the first time enjoyed having a companion to church.

Fiammetta, moreover, was exquisitely well bred, refined to her finger tips, gentle, and courteous. One could not have wished for a more ideal room companion. She was as orderly and precise as Gaby had been scattered and rough. All Fiammetta's personal appointments were beautiful and she had drawerfuls of lovely linen neatly arranged. Of course the other girls discovered this very quickly and Nera, Bianca, and Ada would bring others crowding into the room to peep inside Fiammetta's chest of drawers as at one of the sights of the hostel!

The letters which the Sienese girl wrote home seemed to be mainly taken up with the praises of Anne, to whom Fiammetta insisted on reading the parents' replies. The Bartanellis told their daughter she was indeed a most fortunate girl to have found in that great city of Milan

such an incomparable protector and confidante as the nobile Irlandese, the *gentilissima e stimatissima Signorina Anna*, and they fervently hoped that their dear daughter would show by her courtesy and deference that she appreciated the great assistance rendered to her by that most kind friend. When reading these letters to Anne, Fiammetta would declaim the involved and high-sounding sentences as though they were verses of an epic poem and, long after the reading had ceased, Anne would smile at those oft-repeated *issime* that seemed to float around her head like a benediction.

One day, she received an envelope containing two letters, one from each of the Bartanelli parents, both written in beautiful copperplate handwriting. They thanked her personally again for all she had done for their little Fiammetta, and they humbly and fervently besought her to do them the signal honour of spending the Easter holidays in their home. Anne was amused and intrigued. Their house in Siena was styled a palazzo. It would be fun to spend Easter in a Sienese palace. She told Fiammetta she would accept and Fiammetta seized both her hands and jumped for joy. Then Anne sat down and composed the draft of a reply, a stately letter, full of high-sounding phrases in which *issime* abounded, and she got Fiammetta to check it over for her. When the draft was approved, she wrote it three times, trying to elevate her sprawling handwriting into some semblance of the Bartanellis' beautiful copperplate.

The family, she learned from Fiammetta, were noble, but they had fallen on evil days and were now poor. Since they could no longer live according to their rank, Fiammetta's mother had the idea of turning the palazzo into a

sort of finishing school for American girls who could afford to pay high fees. They believed it would be useful in such a scheme if Fiammetta knew English. For this reason, they had consented to part from her. They had surrendered her to the great city of Milan, hoping that she would there learn not merely English, but general acumen in the conduct of life.

Shortly after the exchange of letters, the friends set off. On the long journey from Milan to Siena, Fiammetta waxed more confidential. She told Anne that Papa was *scoraggiato*; he was a man who had lost heart; her Mama said he was a changed man since the Great War. Investments had gone badly with him; he was broken in health; the world had changed. He could not endure the new order. It was too much for him.

The journey was very long; they were travelling all day, and had to change trains at Genoa, where there was a long delay. Fiammetta refused to enter the station restaurant, or still less a near-by hotel for a meal. She received the suggestion to do so almost with horror, and said that it would be most *sconveniente*, and that her parents would not approve. The girls accordingly bought biscuits and fruit and furtively consumed the light fare in a corner of the railway carriage, Fiammetta taking infinite precautions to nibble privately, without being observed. If a porter's step sounded in the corridor, she would hide the biscuit under the book in her lap and wait until the man had passed. Anne made enormous efforts to suppress her impatience. Whenever she evinced the slightest sign of fatigue on this journey, Fiammetta burst into a flood of apologies and regrets, taking upon herself all the blame and reproach of the Italian railway system.

The little Sienese grew ever more radiant as they drew near to Siena. There were few people on the train and no bustle on the platform. An old cabby outside waved his whip at Fiammetta and laboriously descended. “This is Giannino,” she explained to Anne. “We have, alas, no longer a carriage of our own, but Mama always employs Giannino.”

The old man limped forward.

“Welcome, welcome, Signorina. The foreign Signorina is most welcome too.” He took the girls’ luggage and put it on the front seat beside him.

As they drove off, Fiammetta fell into an animated conversation with him. He told her that her parents were well and looking forward to her arrival, that the magnolia tree in the garden was in blossom just today to welcome her, that his own wife and children were flourishing, that his Vilma had now gone to work in the palazzo and was most happy there.

“*Eccoci, eccoci,*” he concluded heartily, drawing up at a wrought iron gate, through which could be glimpsed a paved courtyard, lined with flowers, and embellished with a springing fountain. Giannino climbed down and pealed the bell. Fiammetta remained sitting in queenly composure and Anne checked her impulse to spring down and look around her. A boy of about sixteen, dressed in brown linen, his face wreathed in smiles, came running across the courtyard.

“Good evening, Signorine, welcome, welcome!”

“Good evening, Beppo!”

Giannino, with a lordly air, passed the luggage to the boy, who staggered indoors with it. Then he handed down the young ladies and conducted them ceremoniously

through the gate, closing it behind them. Fiammetta ran through a door on the right, which led into a small vestibule, obviously used as a lounge, for it was furnished with several armchairs, and books were lying about on the low tables. Through an inner door in this room, a woman now hurried, her arms outstretched to Fiammetta, who flung herself into them:

"Fiammetta, *carina, carina.*" The greetings between mother and daughter were affectionate and prolonged. Taller and far more graceful than her daughter, the Signora was typically Italian with lively brown eyes, dark hair, and olive skin. Mother and daughter made a curious and pleasing contrast. The Signora broke off her endearments suddenly, and took her visitor's hand with a disarming smile of apology.

"Welcome, Anna. You have given us much pleasure by coming to us. I hope you will be very, very happy here. We will do our utmost to make you happy. We are so grateful to you for protecting our little Fiammetta."

Fiammetta led Anne to her room, apologising all the way for the length and steepness of the stairs (four flights of white stone steps, hollowed in the centre from age). Beppo had already deposited the luggage and came bustling after them with brass cans of hot water, his face still crinkled with delighted smiles. A gush of scented warmth greeted Anne when she entered her room. There was a white china stove in the corner and from it came the cheerful crackle of pungent pine logs. The walls were painted cream and on the polished parquet floor there was a gay pink rug to match the pink coverlet on the little bed. It was a charming room; its fresh and inviting daintiness seemed to smile a welcome. She made a quick toilet, chang-

ing her shoes and frock, and when she greeted Fiammetta again, she said with gentle remorse:

"I understand much better now how fearfully hard it must have been for you when you first came to the hostel."

The girls dined alone, Fiammetta excusing the non-appearance of her Father by saying he was lying down with a bad headache, adding that her Mother was sitting by him in his room waiting for him to feel better.

Beppo brought the dishes. As they began the meal, a delicious omelette and salad, light wine and fruit, a little girl came in noiselessly and stood before them, with her hands behind her back, the image of patient attention. Fiammetta greeted her as Vilma. She was about fourteen years old, but very small for her age, and she was dressed in pink print with a spotted muslin apron tied at her waist, brown shoes, and white cotton stockings. Her long brown hair was plaited and then coiled about her high forehead like a crown. But it was the subdued expression on her little grave face, her elusive air of delicacy, and the liquid appealing eyes that attracted Anne. She was a perfect waitress, anticipating every need and moving around the table with the devoted air of a little priestess, recalling the Psalmist's simile: "As the eyes of a hand-maiden are upon the hands of her mistress . . ."

Vilma was in perfect tune with the rest of the dining-room appointments: the cream linen on the polished table, the antique glass and silver, the mauve blossoms in the crystal jar. But there was something else in the place, some indefinable joy like a certainty that rectitude and kindness dwelt there, as though the very air breathed beneficence. Anne fell into a mood of happiness deeper than mere gayety or contentment, a Grimm's fairy-tale feeling,

as though she were spellbound in some castle of magic, where the frictions of common life had ceased.

This impression was heightened when she retired to her room. There was a knock in a few moments and Vilma entered sedately:

"Bisogno, Signorina?"

Anne shook her head with a smile, but the child was retreating with such a disappointed air at being unable to render any service, she set her to unpack the suitcase and put everything away. Vilma worked quickly and neatly, with the same grave air of devotion that had captivated Anne downstairs. When she had gone, Anne leaned out of the window; it gave upon a garden, now bathed in a moonlight so intensely brilliant that every detail stood out with startling clarity. The garden was bounded by a low white wall, beyond which the ground seemed to drop with precipitate steepness. Anne could see the tops of cypresses and ilexes, the roofs of houses, and, in the faraway hollow, twinkling lights that looked like orange points in the white moonlight. Siena is built on three hills, and it seemed that the palazzo garden had all the benefit of the resultant diversity. A huge magnolia tree stood guard over the garden, seeming to offer its profusion of great purple blossoms to the disdainful orb in the sky. Two cats frisked about on the brick-paved paths, while rows of white-faced flowers peeped at their gambols. Tomorrow, thought Anne, as she slipped between the warm sheets and lay listening to the faint crackle of the logs in the stove, tomorrow, surely, this spell will be broken and I'll stand again in the light of common day.

She sighed. Life would be so serenely untroubled if it were not for her regrets about Jim. There were times when

this recurrent pain threatened to devour her heart and she had to steel herself rigidly to take no action. She condemned his behaviour with righteous disdain, for he had completely withdrawn that dear and prized companionship of his merely because she had asked for time in making a terrific decision. He had never again referred to the matter after that conversation at Cadenabbia. It was their last expedition together. The following week, he had spent hours in private conversation with Bamfield and there had been considerable cable activity. Then Jim had left for New York quite suddenly. He had given her no warning of this move, merely including her in the round of good-byes to the staff. Anne had experienced a pang of real pain when he slipped casually into the typists' room and began to shake hands with the two little widows, who showed no surprise and evidently knew all about his plans. When she took his hand, it was as unresponsive and non-committal as his eyes. Injured pride has made him demoniacal, she thought. When the door closed behind him, she got to her feet in angry bewilderment as though without her own volition. Surely, surely he was not going like that . . . she could not let him go like that! She heard the roar of a taxi being started and she sat down again helplessly. The two little widows were chattering about his promotion to the New York office; it was better for himself of course, but they were so sorry to see him go. He would be missed from the staff, such a pleasant young man, *tanto gentile, tanto simpatico*. All that day, Anne was crushed under a weight of loneliness, wrestling with the devil (as she imagined) who prompted her insistently to find out his ship from Genoa and cable him. She would do nothing of the kind, she told herself fiercely. She had her

dignity to consider, she was not one to send hysterical cables. . . .

It was a month now since he had gone and she had done nothing. How wise she had been after all, for now he had had time to write and he had not written! It was better so, she told herself. What was she whimpering about? Best bury the foolish little episode! But she did not like the sleepless nights she had known in that month, and she would never admit — even to herself — the reason for them. Those hours before sleep came were hideous, there was no other word to describe them. All the imps that have license to torture the human mind seemed to descend on her then to mock her. They took the reality of her daily life and cunningly inverted it until it seemed a wearisome and hollow delusion of monotonous, inferior work in which her real self was being gradually stifled. They reminded her of Jim and his ways and his outlook until the loss of him seemed the only real agony of her life, a pain quite beyond endurance. She would not be able to bear it; it would drive her mad. Tomorrow she would whisper to the imps of torment, tomorrow I will end it. I will write and cable. I will follow him to New York on the first boat and throw myself at his feet. And the imps encouraged her with their hints about everlasting loneliness, defeat, and despair.

But things would look different again in the morning. Anne would throw herself into her work with frenzied zest. She was deliberately busy and another day would go by while she made no attempt to cure her pain. Time will cure it, she told herself. That is the part of wisdom. But Fiammetta's invitation had seemed providential, for new scenes are a help in forgetting.

The girls took a supply of books, rugs, and cushions into the warm garden on the following morning. Mama had counselled them to do nothing on the first day of their holiday, but rest after the journey. Fiammetta paused in the doorway and indicated a man squatting on a broad, flat stone in the sunniest corner. He was gazing into vacancy, apparently absorbed in sunning himself. “There’s Papa,” she said, “you see now how he spends all his time?” She had a slightly shamefaced air. Cavaliere Bartanelli rose with a jerk when he saw them and came forward, bowing and smiling. He was a tall man, dressed in a dark suit, his white hair very sparse at the temples, his cheeks cavernous, dark hollows under his eyes. His left hand was gloved, the arm swinging uselessly at his side, but he extended his right to Anne and bowed low over hers.

“We are honoured,” he said, “by your friendship with our daughter, and we feel toward you that great gratitude which only parents can feel toward someone who has been signally kind to their only child. Now, you have added to our obligation by accepting the hospitality of our poor home.”

Anne smiled into his weary eyes set in kindly creases. Gravely he helped Fiammetta ensconce her in a sheltered arbour, bowed to them again, and went pacing slowly back to the house.

“Can you believe,” asked Fiammetta, “that he is some years younger than Mama? But he is a war victim, you know. Mama says he is only a shadow of his former self. They are so devoted to one another, Papa and Mama, that sometimes I feel quite left out in the cold! Since the war, they have never been separated even for a day. I cannot remember it very well, but Mama says that the anxiety of

war time was so terrible for her, nothing matters since it is over and she has Papa safe. She never grumbles about anything now, she has been through so much in the past."

The girls sat chatting and reading in the garden until the Angelus rang. Siena has its own fashion of making this announcement. An old wooden clapper, hanging under the door of a near-by convent, a clapper that squawked surprisingly, gave them the first intimation of the hour. Innumerable bells at once took up the word, as hundreds of towers and steeples were called into life. The great full-throated double *tocco* of the Cathedral vibrated through the air; the golden-tongued bell of St. Dominic's added its stately emphasis, speaking through the chimes of twenty or thirty bells of deeper resonance, and over that full body of sound hosts of little airy, silver bells poured out and scattered a cascade of music. Cheap brassy bells joined bravely in, and harmonised, until presently all the air was vibrating and throbbing and ringing with the story of the Annunciation.

Anne sprang to her feet to listen.

"Fiammetta," she exclaimed joyously, "your Siena is *Hy Brasil*, or maybe *Atlantis*, the *Land of the Blest*." Fiammetta was almost apologetic for the fervour of the bells:

"It's just a city of churches and convents, you know, with houses sandwiched between them."

That profound impression of living under a beneficent spell endured during the whole three weeks. Anne was so happy (except for her secret regrets) that she almost walked on tiptoe. She was fearful about her felicity, fearful of a sudden awakening to some dismal and humdrum monotony such as she had known, to a life with its usual sharp edges, among people with angry eyes and bitter

tongues. The smooth and untroubled current of living in the palazzo seemed too good to be real.

They went for long carriage drives to places of interest around Siena: the Signora concealed in furs, from which only her happy face peeped; her husband enveloped in a huge tweed cape with a velvet collar, and swathed in rugs; Giannino, the gayest of the party, proudly flicking his whip and boasting of the prowess of his horse. Fiammetta's parents spoke little on these outings, preferring to encourage the girls to talk about Milan, and smiling at their daughter's chatter.

The valleys around Siena were veiled in cherry and plum blossom. The warm air was full of the heavy scent of cyclamens. There was spread everywhere a carpet of glowing and tender green where the young corn was springing up even under the grey and gnarled branches of the vines. Anne was entranced with the profusion of spring flowers and the winelike taste of the air.

One of their drives was to the mediaeval convent settlement of Lecceto, where the blue air seemed to dream around the dark ilex groves. Another day, they drove all the way to San Gimignano, the Town of the Beautiful Towers; strange, forbidding square brown towers, Anne judged them, though they were clothed just then in garlands of yellow wallflowers that grew out of the crevices and hung down the sides. When Giannino sighted those yellow festoons, he became very excited; he pointed his whip at them exultantly and hailed them as the Spring, *Ecco la primavera.*

Accompanied by Fiammetta, Anne explored on foot all the churches of Siena (the convenient size of the city permitting this). But one church, San Domenico, was a sort

of forbidden territory for some days, since Cavaliere Bartanelli had said he wanted to take her there himself, and the visit had to be arranged with the Prior. The family had a very special regard for this church because of its memories of Saint Catherine of Siena.

The tanners and weavers still predominate in that quarter of the city directly overlooked by San Domenico, just as they used to predominate during St. Catherine's lifetime in the thirteenth century. The church stands on a clifflike eminence and is reached by a stiff climb. An aged priest in a white habit, jangling keys, came to the door to meet them. He led them first into the locked chapel of Saint Catherine, explaining with a grave and patient courtesy both her story and the story of the church, with which it is interwoven. Anne was moved by the manner in which Dominican history seemed to live for this venerable man. After all, Saint Catherine died as far back as 1380, but the prior talked about her as regrettfully as if she had died only last week. He lamented as far too unworthy the ceiling decoration of her chapel, and he discussed from the point of view of a possible likeness the portrait of the Saint which hangs there, and is said to be painted by a contemporary. It was the prior's opinion that the painting was a good likeness, though it certainly did not flatter the subject.

"She looks in it," he said, "merely a poor thing of no account, an absolute misery. But then she very probably *did* look like that. She had suffered so much at the age shown in the portrait, how could she have looked otherwise? Oh, no one would have glanced twice at our poor Catherine for the sake of her looks, and yet . . . you know what she was?"

The background to these pleasurable excursions was the home life of the Bartanellis, radiating a happiness so complete that it diffused itself on all who came into contact with it. Anne was greatly attracted by Signora Bartanelli, who was the soul of that life in the palazzo. She was her husband's inseparable companion, entirely devoted to him, and yet a marvellous organiser, the tiniest wheel of her household running smoothly. She was tolerant and kindly and every member of her staff seemed utterly content. But she never discussed housekeeping. She kept her problems to herself and solved them on her own account, without calling the world's attention to their urgency. Her dark eyes were full of understanding.

On several occasions, she questioned Anne about Fiammetta's progress in Milan. Anne was too honest to deceive her.

"To tell you the truth, I do not think she is clever at languages, Signora, or even very interested in them. If she were, she would practise her English with me, but I can never persuade her to do so."

"My little Fiammetta was never clever, you know," the Signora answered resignedly, "but in any case I think it very good for her to have some experience of life elsewhere than in her own home."

Anne ventured to sound a warning note about opening their lovely house to American girls.

"Won't it be a dreadful intrusion on your peace?" she said.

The Signora laughed. "That is Alberto's idea too," she said. "We are always putting off the evil moment. In fact we may never do it. We haven't a *dota* for Fiammetta, that is our great trouble. The men in Italy are not romantic,

Anne, and they always expect money with a wife. As for ourselves, we are very content, but Fiammetta's future is a problem to us."

Cavaliere Bartanelli repeated the same thing to Anne as he paced with her the paved walks in the garden:

"We will have to rouse ourselves," he told her, "to do something big for Fiammetta, so that she may marry well. A *pensione* for foreign ladies would be about the least difficult. Perhaps we would not need to do it for long. Edvige assures me she would enjoy it. Of course we could also sell the palazzo and retire to a flat, but personally I should find that bitterly hard. I love this house, which has been in my family's possession for three hundred years."

They were treading on the fallen blossoms of the magnolia and Anne frowned down on the purple petals. In this country they were always harping on the theme of marriage; every girl in the hostel in Milan had that goal in view, and Gaby's parents, and now Fiammetta's.

"It seems to me, Cavaliere," she said hesitantly, "it seems to me that you both worry unduly. Isn't Fiammetta very well as she is? Why trouble about marriage at all?"

Her host glanced at her in surprise.

"She has never shown any signs of a religious vocation," he said. "I think if she were tending that way, she would have been sure of it already several years ago."

"No, I don't mean that," said Anne hastily. "I agree with you there. Fiammetta has no notion of being a nun. But couldn't she take some middle course, neither marriage nor a convent, but some career. If not languages, then something else. . . ."

The Cavaliere flung up his right arm and shook his head with a vehemence that surprised Anne:

“There is no such thing,” he said. “There is no such thing. Oh, I have heard it said that in northern countries a woman, who is not a nun, can yet remain unmarried in the world with honour. Among us, there is no such thing. If a girl has not a vocation, then she must marry. There is absolutely no third course.”

Anne experienced the nearest approach to annoyance she had known in Siena. Her ears burned with indignation. What benighted people, she thought angrily, with their mediaeval notions!

Cavaliere Bartanelli observed her altered countenance and was mortified in his turn.

“Do not misunderstand me,” he said, a charming, almost comical, appeal on his face. He invited her with a gesture to sit in the little arbour by the stone parapet, taking a seat beside her.

“My views do not apply to you, of course,” he explained apologetically. “I understand that you were an orphan from infancy and that you were obliged to fend for yourself. You seem to have done it with signal success, and Edvige and myself admire you for it more than I can say. I beg of you to forgive me if I have said anything that has jarred on your susceptibilities. I am a very ignorant and untravelled man. I only know my own country, Siena, and I speak only for her.”

Tears were smarting behind Anne’s eyelids. She was very ashamed of such needless emotion. What in the world had happened to her in this place? She was being bewitched out of her capacity for effort, like the lotus-eaters of fable. Resolutely she pulled herself together, and spoke decisively:

“It is different in Ireland,” she said. “There, a girl who

is not drawn to a religious life, nor romantically inclined toward marriage, may seek a third course in a career, and find just as much happiness."

"Wonderful," said her host thoughtfully. "Wonderful. I must believe it if you tell me so. And such a one, I mean the third kind, can live out her old age with honour?"

"How do you mean 'with honour'?" Anne asked crisply.

"I mean this, is the unmarried elderly woman respected in your country? Has she just as good a social status as her married sister?"

"Oh, yes, indeed," Anne said confidently. "There is no difference. She is just as much respected, and interest in her career saves her from loneliness."

"Wonderful," repeated the Cavaliere thoughtfully. "Wonderful. And how that must simplify matters for parents!"

"Is it really such a crux here, the marriage question?" demanded Anne. "Or are you just being old fashioned?"

"Oh, no," said her host earnestly. "We have abandoned many of our customs and traditions since the war, regrettably, but when we purpose to marry Fiammetta advantageously, we are acting on our certain knowledge of what is best for her. Poor child, it would be terrible to leave her behind us, alone, her life wrecked through our selfishness."

He went on musingly:

"We have had such joy from her. You know her name is Anna Maria, but we called her Fiammetta because when she first learned to walk, she was so full of joyous life. She used to run all round this garden on the tips of her toes, preferring to dance rather than to walk, bubbling over with laughter, her golden curls streaming behind her.

How terrible would it be then to surrender her to a sad old age, to a loveless solitude of neglect and disregard. To avert such a fate from her, I would rather sell up everything here and retire to a garret, so as to be sure of seeing her happy and protected before we go.”

He leaned earnestly toward Anne, and spoke with intense conviction:

“That is how things are among the Sienese,” he said. “One must live as one’s people live. If Fiammetta were not married, she would become like one of those sad old spinsters whom you see attending the confraternity meetings up at San Domenico. You must have noticed them. They dress in black and they look pale and mortified. Poor things, they seek the consolations of religion in order to appease their sense of unfulfilment and futility.”

But Anne shook off with determination the sober reflections induced by these conversations. When she repeated the gist of them to Fiammetta, the little Italian laughed merrily and said:

“The dear big fools! Take no notice of them. I will never, never leave them. They would die without me!”

Until the end of the visit, the two girls were very happy companions on their walks around Siena, and on Anne the magic of the city descended almost to the exclusion of every disturbing thought.

She walked fifty times through the *Piazza del Campo*, without ever feeling fully convinced that it was real. That open space where the three hills meet in the centre of the city, never seemed other than incredible. Semicircular and concave, it is shaped like a shell and paved in segments with pale pink bricks through which the vivid grass ap-

pears in timorous blades. All the steep streets of Siena converge on this place of incredible beauty. It holds the daylight and the warmth long after the high narrow streets have become chilly and dark, its pavement seeming to glow with the pearly lustre of a real shell, making perfect the illusion.

In the evenings, when Anne and Fiammetta had occasion to cross this dreamlike Piazza on their way home, the same intoxicating breath of pleasure assailed Anne. She would relax her pace and try again to assimilate the beauty around her. The tapering Tower of the Mangia, one of the lovely features of the Piazza, springing into the air with such free grace that its very stones seem to live, had an appearance of adding to the general reassurance of that hour.

“Be happy,” it told her. “You are right when you think that freedom is sweet. You will have enchanted springtimes all your life. Be happy. There is no old age and no disillusionment.”

PART TWO

Chapter Eleven

ANNE was glad when she reached the harbourage of a seat far up the aisle, near the altar. It had been an oppressive business getting through the crowd around the door. She found the Nuptial Mass in her Missal, marked the place and waited. The priest descended with an open book in his hand, and the ceremony began. At his signal, Franco and Fiammetta advanced to the altar rails and knelt there, the best man and the little bridesmaid shoudering them closely. Franco was a fine, upstanding fellow, with rugged features and a shock of nondescript hair. He was head and shoulders taller than his bride.

The priest began to read from his book, occasionally glancing up to guide the pair, indicating with a gesture when they were to clasp hands, when Franco was to put the ring on Fiammetta's finger, and when he was to hand her the gold and silver coins.

This rite of the Church was absolutely unknown to Anne. Although both her sisters were married, she had not been present at the ceremonies. She now found herself so close to the altar, she could hear every word, and she followed the ceremony in her Missal too, with a newly awakened interest.

She had accepted the invitation to Fiammetta's wedding with a feeling of benevolent superiority characteristic of her attitude to her little Sienese friend. It was now two

years since Fiammetta had left the hostel, supposedly capable of writing and speaking English. During that interval, her parents had realised their ambitions for her, without the distress of opening up the palazzo as a guest house for tourists. Anne vaguely understood that they had been unexpectedly lucky with certain shares, but that nevertheless they had gone to the verge of impoverishing themselves in order to "settle" Fiammetta to the best advantage.

It was late in the morning. Anne was already tired. They had had an exciting few days' festivities at the palazzo, where Anne had thrown herself with a will into the work of assisting the Signora Bartanelli, Fiammetta herself having become as dewy and limp as the occasion required. The days had been crowded with little entertainments, packing, and prolonged farewell visits to Fiammetta by her friends, who wanted to take leave of her as a *Signorina*. The two girls had sat up late every night parcelling countless gayly decorated little bags of sugared almonds to be sent to friends in token of the marriage.

On the morning of the event, the household was astir before daylight. Marriage in Italy is a strenuous affair, because the civil ceremony has to take precedence over the religious rites. Under a sky more like a lake than a sky, giving promise of a radiant autumn day, they had gone to early Mass and Holy Communion, where they were joined by Franco and his friends. As they returned home all Siena, nay the whole earth, was illuminated with gold and coppery loveliness, with a sort of scent and glow and celestial exquisiteness. It was a rather sad little family breakfast, their last together. Then Fiammetta's lengthy toilet had begun, with everyone assisting, including Vilma and Beppo who wept noisily into the bride's train as they

escorted her downstairs. The two families had then driven in state to the municipal headquarters where Fiammetta and Franco were married in the eyes of Italian law by an official who hurried through his business without interest or enthusiasm, scarcely glancing at the little bride's finery. From this grimy office, with its bare, unwashed floor, they had set out for the Cathedral. The moment the religious service began, however, Anne's feelings of tolerance and patronage deserted her. She felt both humbled and moved. She was especially amazed at the almost bald brevity of the rite.

"Wilt thou take her for thy lawful wife? . . ."

"I will."

Words of eternal significance, but uttered without adornment.

". . . to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do us part. . . ."

The power of these words suddenly overwhelmed her. She wondered how the rest of the congregation could listen to them so unmoved. Could anything be more complete? It covered every possibility, this inviolable and enduring human partnership.

How long are we to be together? And the voice of the immemorial Church answers with unequivocal and solemn finality, "From this day forward until death sundereth you," and she makes both parties to the contract repeat these words, lest any shadow of misunderstanding should remain in their minds. And it was as though these children who had come to her in quest of the sacrament had asked her also (for the human mind is fallible and shrinks from such finality), it was as though they had asked her fear-

fully, are there really no circumstances, short of death, which would justify us in separating — later on of course, when we have given this partnership a fair, the very fairest, trial? But the Church answers, "No," repeated twice over, in the simplest terms, so that even little children could not fail to understand the emphatic negative.

"for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer,
in sickness and in health . . ."

All human circumstances are comprehended in those terrible, invincible bonds. And how long are those bonds to last, how long did you say?

"from this day forward . . . until death."

The priest said it twice, making Franco and Fiammetta repeat it separately after him.

At this point, Anne had a most curious experience, and she could never determine afterwards whether it was supernatural, or merely psychic. It seemed to her that the church was empty, save for herself, the couple who were being married, and the priest. She, Anne, seemed to be sitting in a sort of twilight while the group at the altar were invested with light. It seemed to her that, in the gloom where she sat, a voice bade her, *observe*, merely that. She was not told to make deductions, or to reason out this marriage, but merely to observe. She got a sudden conviction that she had been brought there today to receive this lesson, whatever it was. This queer experience only lasted a second.

The Nuptial Mass began. She opened her Missal and followed the prayers attentively. At the Introit, sudden and inexplicable tears blinded her:

"May the God of Israel join you together; and may he be with you who took pity upon two only children. . . ."

The pair at the altar were dreadfully pathetic, really, the dumpy little Fiammetta and her stalwart, rather awkward, groom. Why were they there? What unseen force was driving them? Love was supposed to be the answer. What was this love, so much deeper than mere sympathy and feelings, which is supposed to guide two people even when their mutual sympathy is temporarily alienated, and their feelings are in rebellion? Whatever it was, it had induced Fiammetta to leave her adored parents and her home, to throw aside every other prospect in life in order to take up the position of Franco's companion, wife, and the possible mother of his children.

Anne had been almost shocked by the words of the marriage service, and at the back of her mind there lingered some feeling akin to resentment against the Church which seemed to make things unnecessarily difficult and irrevocable in that rite so disconcertingly brief. Its finality and comprehensiveness were almost preposterous. These two were supposed to seek solely the supreme good of each other, always and in everything, and forever. Was not this a preposterous demand to make upon human nature, and who could rise to it? But as the Mass proceeded, there shone upon her the sudden realisation of the sacrament. Marriage was a sacrament, a great sacrament, and that fact explained everything, made everything simple. A sacrament conferred grace. Grace made the difficult thing seem not only easy, but absolutely right and reasonable.

The pair who knelt at the altar rails had entered into a relationship which the Epistle compared to nothing less exalted than the relationship between Christ and His Church. Lofty considerations, almost too lofty for the mind to follow.

But the very sacrament itself would help those who received it to understand it: “May the Lord send you help from the sanctuary, and defend you out of Sion.” Since Christ has thus blessed marriage, then He had made the marriage vows a claim on His favour. And if it needs great grace to rise to the demands of marriage, that grace is supplied abundantly through the sacrament.

The Gospel reverted to the theme of a finality that is absolute:

“Therefore now they are not two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.”

The very Canon of this ancient Mass is interrupted in order that a special blessing might be pronounced on the newly married pair, and in this great blessing, the Church once again reaffirms her teaching. It is strange (thought Anne) that almost the whole of this blessing is addressed to the wife, and the husband appears for the moment to be forgotten, thus seeming to imply that the chief responsibility for married happiness rests on the wife:

“O God, who hast consecrated wedlock by a surpassing mystery, since in holy matrimony is shown forth the sacrament of Christ and His Church; O God, who joinest woman to man, and ordainest their life in common chiefly in order that theirs might be that blessing given by Thee in the beginning, and which alone, neither the punishment Thou didst inflict for the sin of our first parents, nor Thy wrath shown in the flood, took away; look down in mercy upon this Thine handmaid who, being about to enter upon wedded life, seeks to be strengthened by Thy protection; may the yoke she has to bear be one of love and of peace; faithful and chaste, may she marry in Christ; her whole

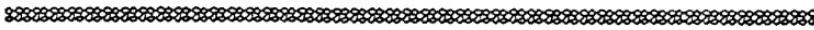
life modelled upon that of the holy women, may she be pleasing to her husband as was Rachel; may she be wise as Rebecca; may she be longlived and true as Sara: may he who is author of all evil tell not at all in her actions: may she pass her days true to the troth she has plighted, and faithful . . . respected for her gravity and revered for her modesty . . . approved and innocent. . . . And may the one and the other of these see their children's children to the third and fourth generation. . . ."

And it is for this that the Canon of the Mass is so solemnly interrupted; as though the whole sacrament were concentrating now upon the wife, and the husband is, for the time being, ignored. The priest turns round from the altar and addresses himself to the bride in loud tones. It is a public statement for the world to hear. When this interruption was over, the Mass concentrated again on the newly married, invoking upon them "abiding peace," with the blessing of "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob," a blessing given with the sprinkling of holy water, as though to reinforce its solemnity and significance. How could bonds forged under such auspices break and fail?

All the absurdities and follies of the endless preparations faded from Anne's mind as the blessing was given. She left the church in a reverential and happy frame of mind. She had witnessed a great sacrament, a sacrament which could not be belittled by all the false thinking, or the ostentatious and trivial pomp with which man has surrounded it.

At the wedding luncheon, Fiammetta's parents were very silent and, when they spoke, displayed a tendency to be emotional. The men, with the exception of Franco, were

jocular. Later that day, Anne decided that the word, aftermath, must have been originally invented to describe that phase of a wedding party which follows the departure of the bridal pair. Even the charm of Siena had faded. It was a long time before she forgot the exalted expression on the faces of the newly married, when they leaned out the carriage window, waving farewell.



Chapter Twelve

MI RINCRESCE, Signorina. Mi rincresce, davvero! Giuseppe mumbled it for the fiftieth time, looking round forlornly at Anne, who smiled her encouragement. She was very touched by the old man's devotion. When he had inquired that morning in the office at what hour her train left, she had not divined his intention. Indeed, she had not given him a second thought until he had turned up at the hostel offering his services to drive her to the station.

His appearance had been followed by one of those animated scenes so frigidly detested by Anne. A dozen girls had appeared in their outdoor clothes, swarming around the carriage with the avowed intention of mounting it somehow and accompanying her to the station.

"No," she said decisively, "I am going alone, say Good-bye to me here and now!"

"But, Anna," a chorus of voices protested, "you cannot leave us so coldly. We must give you a suitable send-off!"

"There's no room in the carriage," she insisted. "Can't you see that my luggage takes up nearly all the space?"

"Some of it can go in front," began Giuseppe obligingly, stretching back his arm for a case, but Anne stopped him with a peremptory gesture.

"I'm driving to the station alone. . . ."

"Anne," the girls pleaded, "we'll sit on top of the luggage, or in front, or anywhere, but we *must* come."

“Yes, a circus!” thought Anne scornfully. “No,” she told them with intimidating fierceness. “You’re not coming with me. I simply won’t allow it.” She cajoled them in quieter tones. “Go back now like good girls. You are sweet to think of it, and I love you all. But I cannot stand the noise you make at railway stations, honestly I can’t. It’s not my way, and my nerves would be upset for a week. You’re the nicest people, but—go back now.” One by one, they sprang on the carriage step to kiss her again, before sadly retreating to the pavement. Giuseppe gathered up his reins.

Allora, ciao, they called to her sadly. *Augurissimi, Anna carissima, buon viaggio! Ciao, ciao! Addio!*

Inexpressibly sorrowful it sounded in the evening air, that lingering soft *Ad-d-i-o*. Giuseppe banged the whip handle in its socket and Garibaldi flicked his ears. Choked with an emotion she would never have admitted, Anne waved with a pretence of gayety at the group of hands raised in the Fascist salute. As the carriage moved off, she glanced up at the windows where faces were appearing and cheerfully waved again. Then Garibaldi clopped around the corner and she had looked her last on the hostel where she had spent ten years.

“*Mi rincresce, Signorina, mi rincresce davvero,*” the old servitor on the box seat mumbled monotonously, casting back at her his oblique, dark glance. Later, he muttered cryptically that it was a good thing she had not allowed the signorine to come, for that would have made too many. Anne had not expected him to approve of her solitary departure, but she was giving him only an abstracted ear. She understood his meaning, however, when they drew up before the imposing entrance to the Central Station.

The whole of the office staff were assembled on its broad steps, waiting to give her an appropriate farewell. “Dreadful,” she said to herself. “I can’t send these home. I’m in for it now!”

She had never expected them to do this, but their amazing kindness to her during the past fortnight should have prepared her for such a gesture. A couple of weeks after Ragazzi had resigned from the I.E.E.C. in favour of employment with a rival firm, the London office had offered her the post of managing director of their branch in Rome. Their managerial designs for her, to which Jim had so confidently and almost enviously alluded, had in fact taken six years to materialise! Banfield had urged her to accept the London offer: it meant a commencing salary of £800 a year, probably more — said he — than she would ever receive in her present subordinate position in Milan. He would be there to give her any advice or help she needed; he would see her occasionally; she could write to him in any difficulty. Anne had accepted the offer in the fatalistic mood that had been growing on her for the last few years. It had been a wrench to uproot herself from the familiar domestic and office setting of Milan, but she ignored this, telling herself that she was an emancipated woman who had won her freedom and, as such, supposed to be unhampered by emotional ties. She could acknowledge no roots that implied a curtailment of her liberty.

The staff had shown no jealousy over her promotion. For some years now, they had seemed unanimous in expressing admiration of her work. Their repeated and fervent congratulations had sounded genuine. A week ago, Signora Chiesa had timidly invited Anne to her flat for an “evening” and had blushed with pleasure when Anne

accepted without a flicker of hesitation. Luckily, Anne thought afterwards, she had not shown any of the surprise she felt at the invitation. It was the Signora herself who opened the door to her ring. The little widow had doffed the drab black dress which she seemed to imagine was the only correct wear for office work. She was dressed in grey silk and had fluffed out her hair, which surprisingly improved her appearance. The sitting room was poorly furnished, but clean and highly polished. A number of butterboxes, carefully painted in enamel, were put to a variety of uses as stands for flowerpots and ornaments. The Signora's father, an aged man with a heavy walrus moustache, was extended in an armchair by the fire, his stick beside him. He excused himself from standing up on the plea that the bad weather had quite crippled him with rheumatism. Signora Piazza, also looking gay and festive, came tripping out from an inner room at that moment, and greeted Anne effusively with a hint of excitement in her manner.

"Have you finished, dear?" little Signora Chiesa asked anxiously.

"Yes, all is quite ready now and it looks beautiful."

The other heaved a sigh of relief. There was a peremptory ring at the bell and she hustled off to admit the cashier at the office, Mario Tonelli, a dark, diminutive little man, earnestly conscientious about his work. Tonelli's favourite and indeed only topic seemed to be his wife and children, for which reason Anne had always affected to despise him. Once he had persisted in pouring into her unresponsive ear all the details of his wife's recent confinement, describing how the sweat had poured off her at the end just like off a horse at the conclusion of a race. He entered the flat

briskly, bowing and beaming, and Anne hoped he would have a more suitable conversational subject tonight. He greeted her with the remark that this was a great occasion.

"Is it?" she said wonderingly. The penetrating aroma of coffee now began to reach them from some hidden source. Old Signor Chiesa struggled to his feet, Tonelli fussily assisting him. Leaning on his stick and on the younger man, he courteously saluted Anne:

"I will leave you young people to enjoy yourselves. Youth for youth. Every happiness to you, my dear. My daughter is always talking about you. I am glad to have met you. You are surprisingly young to be able to do such great things. It's a new world . . . we old people, we don't know where we are!"

Another ring at the bell cut short his speech. Tonelli assisted him through an inner door of the little *salon*, as his daughter admitted Giuseppe, looking strange in his best clothes and shaved. No persuasions would induce the old janitor into accepting a seat in the circle. He leaned against the wall in his usual way and beamed on the company.

"Is it a staff gathering?" Anne asked Tonelli. "We seem to be all here." The little cashier smiled at her mysteriously. Another ring, and this time ten men crowded in: Banfi, the factory foreman; Cardano, the brown-eyed engineer, whose interest in Anne had been so embarrassing to her on her first day in the office; there were also the two clerks, brothers named Roscellino; the assistant engineers, Robecchi, Galozzi, and Poletto; and the three draughtsmen, Capelli, Merlini, and Carni. The whole staff were there. The younger men were in boisterous high spirits, all talking and laughing together, but through the

din Anne gathered that the occasion was a festive evening in her honour. The two little Signore now hurried off and immediately returned bearing trays laden with sandwiches and Milanese confectionery; they were closely followed by a large servant woman carrying beverages: coffee, *birra*, vermouth, and a choice of mild liqueurs. There were not chairs enough to go round, but the men with much geniality accommodated themselves on the floor. Cardano squatted at Anne's feet and gazed up at her with his liquid orbs. She smiled at him with the tolerance of long usage. He was a devoted husband and father and his endless demonstrations of admiration for Anne were mere harmless asininity. Soon the air was blue with the smoke of highly aromatic cheroots.

The Roscellino brothers leaned over the back of Anne's chair and whispered comments that sounded like excuses for the party. She gathered that if they had been left in charge of the organising, they would have thought of something far more suitable and *chic*. From the jests they exchanged with Capelli and Merlini, who were standing beside her, she understood that the little Signore had only prevailed over the rest of the staff after much argument, on the plea of their closer friendship with Anne; and that the men had very reluctantly left it to the women, hoping for nothing better than a rather correct, dull evening. The brighter spirits among them were looking round the little flat with a disparaging air. Anne chided them with an expressive grimace.

"Rome," sighed Cardano, "it is unique among the cities of the world. How fortunate you are! And it is your true habitation, for there beauty will be framed in beauty. Never live elsewhere than in Rome; it is your only setting.

I believe now that the artists, sculptors, and architects who created the eternal city made it specially to be your background! They must surely have known of your coming when they devised that incomparable Rome!"

The two little Signore were still bustling about, attending to their guests. Tonelli interrupted Cardano's flight to press on Anne's attention a plate of *svogliate*, while Galozzi began to tell her excitedly about the performance of his new *Lancia*, speaking so rapidly in a flood of Milanese that she confined herself to nods of assent by way of reply. Meanwhile Giuseppe was quaffing deep into his *birra*, and Corni was squinting at the light through his liqueur glass.

When most of the trays, plates, cups and glasses were re-collected on the sideboard, the two Signore had a whispered colloquy at the end of the room and beckoned to Cardano. He came back from their corner with a salver on which reposed a leather box, to which was attached a card bearing the good wishes of the I.E.E.C. staff. This, with a gallant bow, he presented to Anne, who was overcome with surprise. She stood up to take the leather box, pausing to lift the cover appreciatively. It was a handsome writing case, elaborately fitted.

“Dear, good friends,” she began, “er—I don't know what to say to thank you. I am most grateful to you all. You are far too kind to the stranger among you. If the Italians have a fault, it is generosity. I will always think of you as the kindest and most affectionate people I have ever met. I do thank you.” She clasped the case and looked round at the circle of flushed, smiling faces. Realising that they had all subscribed for this gift, and that many of them were poor, sudden shyness choked her. Vociferously they

applauded her poor speech. "Basta," grumbled Giuseppe, taking the box from her and placing it reverently on the piano, at which Cardano seated himself, running his fingers over the keys with a practised air. The Roscellinos sang, "Oh, Santa Lucia" and Robecchi provoked much merriment with a comic song, a parody to the air of *Una voce poco fa*. Withdrawn from the musical group around the piano, the two little Signore now gossiped happily in a corner. Anne leaned against the wall to chat with Giuseppe. The atmosphere in the small room was impenetrable with the haze of smoke. Her eyes were smarting.

More touching than that last festive evening together and the big gift for which they had subscribed, was the series of presents with which they individually loaded her during the following days. Cardano, as a tribute to her intellect, had given her an Italian dictionary, a large volume, remarking that it was the best obtainable. The Signore had given her examples of their skill as needle-women: embroidered handkerchiefs and doilies. The Roscellinos had presented her with a handsome edition of Dante's *Commedia*, and Banfi a leather book cover that exactly fitted it. Giuseppe, with extreme bashfulness, had given her a little trinket box on the lid of which was framed a coloured picture of the cathedral. In the messages attached to these gifts, they had called her *nobilissima irlandese, stimatissima collaboratore*, and, humorously, *onorevolissima signorina direttrice*. . . .

And now here they were again, though she had bidden them a last Good-bye. The honour of the firm demanded that she should not leave Milan without a send-off! They engulfed her as Giuseppe handed her down, scarcely giving her time for a farewell stroke to Garibaldi's nose.

Linking Banfi and Cardano, she was borne toward her train. All except Giuseppe crowded into her compartment, where she sat temporarily between the two little Signore, who loudly marvelled at and prodigiously admired the splendour of her travelling arrangements. *Che bel lusso*, they sighed.

Aggressively the young men crowded the windows of the compartment to keep out intruders, ignoring Anne's mild protest that she did not really wish to travel to Rome in solitude. Cardano made a flowery speech to which nobody listened, but Tonelli thanked him on behalf of Anne. Capelli and Merlini were meanwhile assuring her in various terms that the sun would never again shine on that office building, that the light of their days had been extinguished. The little Signore almost tearfully entreated her to write soon and tell them everything. Poletto told her earnestly that his wife was from Rome and that they would most willingly go to live there if she could find an opening for him. . . . Then the porter was heard slamming doors. The Signore embraced Anne. *Anch'io? Anch'io?* the irrepressible young men entreated as they sprang down. She leaned out the window to press Giuseppe's hand. Hats were waved and handkerchiefs fluttered as the train moved off and a chorus of voices rose: *Ciaò, ciaò, arrivederci! Ricordici, Signorina, non dimentichi, addio, addio:* . . . The voices faded in the roar of the train; the group of smiling faces disappeared around a bend. She was alone.

Immediately the mood of responsive gayety fell from her as completely as though a mask had been dropped. Her face looked old, lined, and sombre as she dispiritedly turned over her magazines. She was mentally tired and bored; for several years now, the very mould of her mind

seemed to have become set in a permanent mood of weariness and discontent. She was a success, but that success was bitterly empty of any intimate satisfaction. The spectre of loneliness dogged her persistently.

Her destination could not thrill her. She knew Rome very well, having already explored it some five times with different groups of Italian and American friends. She had booked now at a hotel where she had stayed several times before and where she was known. Her plan was to look for a suitable flat later on at her convenience and furnish it to her liking. Years ago in Milan she could have lived on such a scale. Yet her higher salary and wider opportunities had never tempted her to leave the hostel and ascend to a correspondingly higher scale of living. She had not sufficient interest to make such a move, preferring to remain at the hostel, where she developed into a chronic grumbler. She was the oldest resident there when she had left and she had occupied the best single room for many years. There was no one there now who was there when she first arrived. The boarders seemed to be entirely changed about every three years. Most of the girls left to get married; they were obsessed with marriage, these Italians. Bianca, Nera, Gaby, Fiammetta, and how many more of her friends were all married now, Gaby much more happily than she had anticipated. Anne was in touch with all of them. Their letters to her were filled with accounts of their wonderful babies and their domestic joys and sorrows. She had heard that even Aline Veysey-Smith was married.

Her promotion likewise had no power to thrill her. There had been a certain faintly pleasing stimulation in the excitement centring about her in the office during the

past fortnight, but otherwise she felt no elation. Her work would be the same as in Milan except that she would be in control of, and responsible for, a small nucleus of the Italian organisation. But her work would be identical inasmuch as she would have to spend from nine to six of her days, except Saturday when it was from nine to one, chained to a desk, the slave of a system. She would be thrown by economic hazards among a new group of people, from whom she could not escape no matter how uncongenial they proved to be, in whose fortunes she could scarcely be interested, whose accidental companionship she would no doubt find frequently wearisome. Some of them would annoy her by bungling inefficiency and others would parade for her admiration a slick commercial smartness equally disgusting! In Rome, as in Milan, she would have to combat every day the discouragement of dull routine and monotony, the oppression of unreality and futility. For years now, she had been disturbed by a new angle of vision on feminine careers in general and on office work in particular, and she was always striving to close her eyes to it, fearful of penetrating to the core of the dissonance that dismayed her lest she be utterly disillusioned. She felt like a child who had built up a house of cards and was afraid to see it fall. She could not afford to see it fall, for that pitiful house of cards was all her life.

Rome! What had happened to her that even that great name could not excite her? There had been a time when she could not hear it spoken without feeling her heart rise. Now it chiefly represented the new environment where she would continue to gain her livelihood as before. Maturity had descended upon her with unfair suddenness and changed the whole face of things. The long pressure

of loneliness and dissatisfaction had blunted her susceptibilities and hardened her mind into a permanent mood of disillusionment and discontent.

Rome would offer no escape from the cold fog of emptiness that had become her mental atmosphere. She would never escape from it now because she would not have the courage to make her escape. She knew that she would cling to her material security and self-sufficiency right up to the threshold of old age, supposing she lived so long.

Happiness! How fervently and how often had they wished her happiness, those good friends in Milan! But how could she attain happiness when she was self-condemned to be an outcast from the only real sanctuary for her woman's nature. She had long ago found out that the rewards of freedom and material success meant absolutely nothing to her. A truth which life had cruelly proved is that for such as she was, a woman not powerfully drawn to religion, nor preoccupied by ill-health, marriage is the only real haven. In debarring herself from that, Anne had denied herself nothing less than life. There is no compensation for such a loss.

How often had this train of thought inevitably led, as now, to Jim, causing that old wound to throb again! Anne had never heard from him since he left Milan seven years ago. He was a man most stubborn in his pride, who would not plead a second time. For a long while, she had been too intoxicated by her own success, too uncertain of her feelings, and too proud to retract her word and write confessing what she suspected was in her heart. When she read that heart at last, both time and her silence seemed to have so ratified her refusal that she had been afraid and ashamed to write, although regret for his loss

had been torture for several years and was a recurrent pain even today. Again and again, she had buoyed up her hopes with dreams of his unexpected return to Milan to seek her, or a letter or cable which would give her the excuse she sought for reopening their affair. But the years had passed without offering her a second chance.

About three years after Jim's sudden departure, Bamfield had one day cabled him congratulations on his marriage. That, to Anne, marked the end of an epoch. She would not admit to herself that the news was a blow; she tried to be grateful for intelligence that delivered her from foolish dreaming.

She had never been distantly approached by a similar emotional experience. She had hurt herself too deeply by her own folly to become innocently receptive again. She told herself drearily that if she were to fall in love a second time, she would have to fake the emotional crescendo. The poets were right when they affirmed that that page is turned once only in every life. In her own case, she had closed that page of beauty in a flurry of fear that she was not ready for it. She had dashed from her own lips the wine of that genuine exaltation and it was her sorrowful conviction that the gift would not be proffered a second time.

She had now given more than ten years of her life to the firm for which she worked, and often the notion of decades of years pursued her. One of her most desolating thoughts was a vista of the years of office work that probably lay ahead of her. Blank and arid years, they offered no enticement, and how were they to be faced? It is all very well to talk of intellectual resources, but Anne had known days when all her resources had failed her: when

she had gone hopefully to her books and they had seemed to look back at her with blank faces, offering nothing; when art had merely mocked her, and music had only availed to flood her soul with melancholy. When one has lost fulness of living, there are no compensations. Reading and varied culture, travel, wide experience of people and places, friendships, freedom, the heady consciousness of efficiency, money, all these had led her only to a deeper knowledge of the empty void in her heart.

She leaned back and closed her eyes, but she could not shut out that conviction of essential defeat. And the rhythm of the train wheels re-echoing through the night seemed remorselessly to confirm her conclusions.

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